



# **INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS AND ORGANIZED LABOR IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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**A History**



**ROBERT J. ALEXANDER AND  
ELDON M. PARKER**



**Greenwood**  
PUBLISHING GROUP

**International Labor  
Organizations and Organized  
Labor in Latin America  
and the Caribbean**

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# International Labor Organizations and Organized Labor in Latin America and the Caribbean

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A History

ROBERT J. ALEXANDER

With the collaboration of Eldon M. Parker

**PRAEGER**

*An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC*

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To Fernanda Helen Perrone

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## Preface

In the past decade I have published a number of volumes dealing with the history of organized labor in Latin America and the Caribbean. Each of them has dealt with the history of the labor movement in a particular part of the Western Hemisphere—one or more of the nations of the area.

The present volume approaches the subject somewhat differently than its predecessors. Each of the earlier studies concentrated on looking at organized labor in a particular part of the hemisphere. The present one concentrates instead on the institutions that are shared by the workers' organizations in the various countries. These institutions include both international organizations limited to Latin America as well as others of broader jurisdiction.

As has been true with all of my books, I have had much help in this one from people who have aided in one way or another in bringing the volume to fruition. Of course, I owe much, in the first place, to the numerous people who have participated in the various institutions that are the subject of this volume. Certainly without the welcome discussion of the activities of those organizations by their leaders and officials, I would have little to write about. At the same time I was given the chance to attend conferences and other meetings of the organizations involved. I also appreciate the opportunities to have had wide use of publications of some of these organizations.

I likewise owe much to people of ABC-CLIO who were instrumental in bringing this book to print. I am much obliged to Dr. James Sabin for his belief in the value of this study, hence making possible its publication,

and Elizabeth Potenza, who pushed forward the process of converting a manuscript into a published book.

As has been the case with many of my recent books, this one could not have been brought to fruition without the technical aid and excellent copyediting carried out by my former student and longtime friend and collaborator, Eldon Parker.

Over the years my late beloved wife, Joan, played a major role in collecting materials about the Latin American labor movements and made numerous valuable contributions that found their way into this volume.

Of course, only I am responsible for any errors of judgment or presentation that appear in these pages.

*Robert J. Alexander  
Rutgers University  
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# Introduction

Organized labor in the various Latin American and Caribbean countries did not exist in isolation from one another or from the worldwide labor movement. From their inception these movements were influenced by what was happening in Europe, where trade unions had begun to acquire significance a generation or so before they appeared in Latin America. Indeed, in a number of countries—Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, among others—European immigrants played a leading role in the establishment of organized labor. Those immigrants in the late 19th and 20th centuries brought with them the various ideologies that came to characterize the early labor movements of the southern Western Hemisphere, particularly Bakuninist anarchosyndicalism, Marxism, and Social Catholicism.

Virtually from their inception, the nascent labor organizations felt themselves part of an international movement, and sought to establish connections with organized labor outside of their countries' national frontiers. These contacts took several forms. First, they sought relations with the labor movements of nearby countries—both other Latin American nations, and in some cases, the United States. Second, they attempted to forge links on a hemispheric basis with labor movements with which they shared a given ideological orientation. Third, they sought to become part of the worldwide organized labor movement—or with the parts of it that shared their general ideology.

## REGIONAL LABOR CONFEDERATIONS

It is clear that in the early decades of the 20th century, the Argentine anarchosyndicalists of the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA)

were among the most successful in establishing contacts and influence in organized labor movements of neighboring countries. However, their efforts to establish a Latin American-wide or hemispheric anarchosyndicalist trade union grouping were less successful. Although conferences were held seeking to bring together anarchosyndicalist unions of a few specific skill groups, there was no successful effort to form a grouping of central labor organizations before World War I. It was not until 1929 that such a confederation, the Asociación Continental Americana de Trabajadores (ACAT) was finally established. However, by that time, anarchosyndicalist influence in the Latin American organized labor movement had suffered a drastic decline from which it could never recover, and ACAT may be said to have been more a symbolic grouping than an effective one.

A different kind of hemispheric labor organization was established in 1918. This was the Pan American Federation of Labor (PAFL), which brought together the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM), which was then the principal Mexican central labor organization. It had an effective life of a little more than a decade, during which it sought to stimulate the growth of the labor movement that had just begun to appear in the Caribbean and Central American areas, while inoculating them against such ideologies as anarchism and Communism. Some of the trade union groups under Socialist leadership sought during the 1920s to organize a rival to the PAFL, but without any notable success.

During the 1920s, a new ideological current developed in both international and Latin American organized labor movements. This was the Communist International (Comintern). Communist parties were established in a number of the Latin American countries and they sought to get control of national labor movements, or to bring such movements into existence if they were lacking.

In 1929, the Comintern organized a conference in Montevideo, Uruguay, of representatives of all the national movements in the various Latin American countries that were under Communist control. That meeting established the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana (CSLA). Following the "Third Period" policies then current in the Comintern, the CSLA sought to establish Communist Party-controlled central labor groups in every Latin American country, splitting Communist-controlled unions away from national central labor bodies that the Communists did not control. The CSLA disappeared in the middle 1930s, when the Comintern policy shifted from isolation to popular frontism.

One fruit of the change in Comintern policy was the establishment of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) in 1938. CTAL, the founding congress of which met in Mexico City, was patronized by the government of President Lázaro Cárdenas, and brought together the great majority of the central labor organizations of the Latin

American republics. These included confederations under the leadership of Socialists and Communists, as well as members of the new national revolutionary parties that were appearing in several countries. The principal tendencies not represented in CTAL at its inception were the anarchists and the Catholics, neither of which controlled major Latin American central labor groups at that time.

However, by the end of World War II this apparent united front within the Latin American labor movement had begun to crack. Under the leadership of Mexican labor Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the CTAL became increasingly dominated by the Communists. This was due in part to the growing influence of the Communists in several CTAL-affiliated national labor centers, in part to the personal influence of Lombardo Toledano who, without ever affiliating with the Mexican Communist Party, followed the internal Communist line during and after World War II, as well as to politically motivated splits in some CTAL affiliates and to the withdrawal of some important non-Communist union groups from the CTAL. The most notable of these was the Argentine Confederación General del Trabajo when it came under the influence and control of President Juan Domingo Perón.

After World War II, CTAL became the Latin American regional organization of the new World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which at its inception was an organization grouping together on a worldwide scale unions of very differing ideological orientations. When in 1949 the WFTU underwent a split, with the withdrawal of the British, U.S., and many other national central labor groups because of growing Communist dominance of the world organization, CTAL continued its role as regional grouping of the WFTU until its own disappearance in the 1960s.

CTAL was succeeded by the Congreso Permanente de Unidad de los Trabajadores de América Latina (CPUSTAL). However, this proved to be a much less cohesive and militant organization than its predecessor.

Leadership in the effort to establish a rival to CTAL after World War II was taken by the American Federation of Labor. The AFL had refused to participate in establishment of the WFTU because of Soviet and other Communist participation in it, and thus for the time being was in a kind of isolation in world trade union affairs. Therefore, it concentrated much of its international attention on Latin America. Serafino Romualdi, an official of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, was named as the AFL's Latin American secretary, and he set about trying to bring together union groups that had appeared in various countries since the formation of CTAL but had not joined it, as well as CTAL affiliates that had either broken away from the Confederación or were ready and anxious to do so. The first result of these efforts was the foundation in Lima, Peru, in January 1948 of the confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores (Inter-American Confederation of Workers—CIT). The American Federation of Labor was one of the principal affiliates of CIT.

With the split in the World Federation of Trade Unions in 1949, and the establishment of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, still another inter-American regional grouping was formed. At its congress in Havana in 1949, CIT had resolved that if the new world federation was formed by national groups opposed to the Communists, CIT and its affiliates would merge with those U.S. and Latin American central labor bodies that drew from the WFTU and CTAL, to form a new inter-American confederation.

In conformity with this decision, CIT went out of existence with the foundation. In January 1951 at a congress in Mexico City, of the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers, known popularly by its Spanish initials ORIT). ORIT was immediately by far the largest and best organized of the regional central labor organization existing in America. This continued to be the case five decades after it was established, although ORIT, like most of the organizations belonging to it, was severely buffeted by adoption of neoliberalism as the reigning ideology of the hemisphere during the lost decade of the 1980s.

Another effort to create a Latin American labor confederation was undertaken by the regime of President Juan Perón of Argentina. He had first won the support of the majority of the Argentine workers in the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) on the way to becoming the country's elected president in 1946, and thereafter was able to convert the CGT into a pliable tool of his regime. He sought to use the Argentine organized labor movement as a tool throughout Latin America. That effort finally took the form of the Agrupación de Trabajadores Latinoamericanos Sindicalistas (ATLAS). The most important preexisting national central labor group to join ATLAS was the longest-lived Mexican group, CROM (Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana), which, however, was by then of secondary importance within the Mexican labor movement. New Peronista union groups were formed in a number of other countries. For several years, labor attachés in Argentine embassies around the hemisphere spent considerable amounts of time and money in trying to entice Latin American trade union leaders to support ATLAS. However, the organization largely collapsed with the overthrow of the Perón regime late in 1955.

One other ideological tendency within Latin American organized labor gained considerable importance in the period following World War II and took organizational form on a hemispheric level. This was Social Catholicism. Virtually from the inception of the history of organized labor in Latin America some priests and laymen in a number of the Latin American countries, inspired at first by the social teachings of Pope Leo XIII, had been active in workers' organizations. However, with a few exceptions, they had tended to concentrate on religious indoctrination, combined with stimulation of cooperative and mutual benefit societies.

In the post-World War II period, both clerical and lay Social Catholics turned increasing attention in various countries of the area toward encouraging the formation of trade unions with a Catholic ideological orientation. Some of these, together with some mutual benefit and similar societies, were first brought together in the Confederación Latino Americana de Sindicalistas Cristianos (CLASC) in 1952.

CLASC soon came under the leadership of an Argentine layman, Emilio Máspero. An organizer of talent, Máspero had considerable success in helping to bring into existence Catholic-oriented national labor groups in several Latin American and Caribbean countries. As time passed, he and his followers tended to emphasize more their classist and revolutionary nature, and less their Roman Catholic orientation. In November 1971 the name of the confederation was changed to Central Latino Americana de Trabajadores (CLAT). However, although relatively well financed, it never succeeded in becoming a major challenge to the ORIT. It also reverted to its early emphasis on Social Catholic ideology.

## **LATIN AMERICAN-CARIBBEAN LABOR AND GLOBAL TRADE UNION GROUPS**

Organized labor in the Latin American and Caribbean countries not only aspired to a certain degree of unity among themselves, but also sought to be part of the global labor movement. Thus, various central labor organizations became affiliates of different world confederations, in conformity with their particular ideological orientation. In addition, in quite a number of cases individual unions in particular countries became part of International Trade Secretariats, global organizations of unions of particular crafts or industries.

Although one of the oldest ideological groupings within the world labor movement, the anarchists were rather late in developing a more or less viable global trade union confederation. This was the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA), established in 1922. It included within its ranks some Latin American anarchosindicalist organizations, and its general secretary addressed the founding congress of the Asociación Continental Americana de Trabajadores when it was finally established in 1929. Some, although probably not all, of the Latin American anarchosindicalist central labor groups became at least nominal affiliates of the IWMA.

In contrast to the somewhat fitful association of Latin American anarchosindicalist central labor groups with the IWMA was the unanimous membership of Communist-controlled union organizations in the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU). Almost by definition, a central labor group organized or captured by the Communists in the 1920s and early 1930s became a member of the RILU. Indeed, the Latin American regional trade union, the CSLA, was established on the initiative and under the supervision of the Red International. This continued to be the case until the



adoption of the Popular Front line by the Communist International, after which the RILU and the CSLA were peacefully buried by the Comintern.

The International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) was established in the 1890s as a global federation of trade union movements under socialist influence. It also had at times some affiliates that were not controlled by socialist parties—notably the American Federation of Labor. It continued to exist until World War II.

Only a handful of Latin American and Caribbean trade union groups belonged to the IFTU. An effort in the 1920s to organize a Latin American confederation of the IFTU member groups was not successful.

To some degree, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), established in 1949 on the occasion of the split in the World Federation of Free Trade Unions, was a continuation of the older IFTU. It brought together more or less the same kind of trade union organizations as the older federation had done. However, insofar as Latin America and the Caribbean are concerned, the ICFTU was a great deal more successful than its predecessor had been. ORIT was the American hemispheric organization of the ICFTU; most (although not all) union groups that belong to ORIT were also affiliated with the ICFTU.

Both the IFTU and ICFTU consisted principally of central labor organizations of various countries. However, more or less closely associated with both of these global union confederations have been the International Trade Secretariats. These were international organizations of unions of workers in specific trades and industries—miners, transport workers, teachers, and so forth.

The trade secretariats were active in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly after World War II. They had affiliates in many of these countries, and provided extensive assistance to those affiliates, in terms of education and training, organization assistance, and mobilization of support in strikes and other specific activities.

## **CONTACTS WITH SPECIFIC LABOR MOVEMENTS OUTSIDE THE AREA**

One other kind relationship with the global labor movement has been of considerable importance to organized labor in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the more or less direct contact and/or association with the trade union organizations of individual countries outside the region. Such relationships have been particularly important insofar as France, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union are concerned.

These linkages have been most obvious in the case of France. The trade union movements of the French ex-colonies (since World War II, departments) largely came into existence as affiliates of one or another of the factions of the French labor movement. Thus, in the post-World War II period, for instance, the Communist-controlled *Confédération Générale du*

Travail, the Socialist-oriented Force Ouvrière, and the several Catholic-inclined trade union groups all had affiliates in Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana. These territories are not discussed in the present volume.

In the case of the ex-colonies of the onetime British West Indies the nascent trade union movements virtually from their inception sought—and to some degree, received—help, encouragement, and in some cases a certain degree of orientation from the British Trades Union Congress (TUC). In at least one case—British Guiana, now Guyana—the new labor movement was actually loosely affiliated for a time with the TUC.

From World War I on, contacts between Latin American and Caribbean labor unions and those of the United States were of considerable significance. However, even before then, there were a handful of unions in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico that were locals of U.S. based international unions.

Starting in 1918, contacts with the U.S. labor movement assumed greater importance. The American Federation of Labor and the Confederación Nacional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) were partners in launching (and for some years maintaining) the Pan American Federation of Labor. Subsequently, the Congress of Industrial Organizations gave its blessing to and maintained contact with the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) for some years.

Then after World War II, the AFL took the lead in bringing together elements within the Latin American and Caribbean labor movements that were opposed to the Communist domination of CTAL, giving rise to the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores in January 1948. Both the AFL and the CIO participated in 1951 in the establishment of ORIT, the American regional organization of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. Through both CIT and the ORIT, the U.S. labor movement gave very substantial contributions to the organizational efforts, training of trade union leadership, and mobilizations to protest persecution of organized labor by various dictatorial regimes. It also sought to bring pressure on the U.S. government and U.S.-owned companies operating in Latin America and the Caribbean to adopt policies that favored instead of militating against the growth and maintenance of strong labor movements in those nations.

In the early 1960s, the association of the U.S. labor movement with those of Latin America and the Caribbean assumed a form beyond that of working through ORIT. The American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) was established. Pioneered by Serafino Romualdi, the long-term representative of the AFL and then of the AFL-CIO, AIFLD was financed principally by the foreign aid program of the U.S. government, but was run by the AFL-CIO. For more than three decades it carried out two sorts of programs in conjunction with the labor movements of various Latin American and Caribbean nations. On the one hand, it carried on extensive

labor leadership training, and on the other it helped to finance social projects such as housing projects and cooperatives.

In the early decades of the 20th century another U.S. trade union group had contacts with and influence in the labor movements of a few Latin American countries. This was the anarchosyndicalist organization, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In the case of the new Mexican labor movement that developed just before and during the Mexican Revolution, a number of its leaders had had their first trade union experience as members of the IWW when they were in exile in the United States. In the case of Chile, members of the maritime workers section of the IWW who visited the country stimulated the growth of a Chilean IWW (often using the English initials for their own organization), which was a significant part of the labor movement for a decade or more.

The relations of the Soviet labor movement with those of Latin America and the Caribbean were much less obvious, although no less important, than those of the countries we have just discussed. Communist trade union leaders, like other party functionaries, were over the decades provided training in the Soviet Union and other Communist-controlled countries. Information that has come out in recent years concerning Soviet subsidization of the Latin American Communist parties would indicate that the trade union activities of these parties, as well as other aspects of their functioning, received substantial monetary aid from the USSR.

All of these aspects of the history of the organized labor movements of Latin American and Caribbean countries will be explored in the pages that follow. It is hoped that the reader will become at least better informed about an aspect of the labor history of the region that has heretofore received relatively little attention.

## CHAPTER 1

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# Anarchosyndicalist Unions and ACAT

The ideology that found widest acceptance in the early decades of the organized labor movement in Latin America was that of anarchism or anarchosyndicalism (we shall use the two terms interchangeably). It was propagated by European immigrants who had participated in the International Workingmen's Association (the so-called First International—IWMA or in Spanish, AIT), in which, during the 1860s and 1870s, the anarchist Michael Bakunin and his followers had struggled for control with Karl Marx and his allies. It was also stimulated by extensive circulation in Latin America of the works of the 19th-century anarchist thinkers and activists such as Proudhon, Peter Kropotkin and Bakunin himself.

Julio Godio wrote, "Beginning in 1870 nuclei of the AIT were formed in Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Martinique. But only in the first three countries was there permanent activity, whereas in the rest there only existed nuclei that carried out propaganda in the mutual benefit societies or through sporadic publications." He also noted that, with the exception of the Argentine group, the First International units in Latin America were under Bakuninist influence.<sup>1</sup>

Anarchism was particularly appropriate to the nature of the economy and the wage-earning class in Latin America in the last decades of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th. The industrial proletariat, such as it was, was employed principally in workshops rather than in large factories, and relations between the bourgeois employer and the proletarian worker were direct and personal rather than bureaucratic.

The anarchist credo of direct action seemed to conform to the situation in which the Latin American workers found themselves. Collective

bargaining, as it had developed in the United States and industrialized Europe, was rejected by the anarchists. The collective contract that was the fruit of bargaining between the unions and the employers committed the unions to such things as agreement not to strike while the contract was in effect, and handling of workers' individual grievances by an established procedure rather than by a walkout of the union members, and this seemed to the anarchists to be class collaboration, which was anathema.

In contrast, the direct action advocated and practiced by the anarchists called for surrender by the employer, not negotiations with him (or her). The anarchist union would present its demands directly to the employer, together with a deadline for meeting them, and if the deadline was not met, the union declared a strike.

If the strike in a particular enterprise was successful, direct action had triumphed. If the employer refused to settle on the union's terms, direct action called for other measures. These included sympathetic strikes by workers in the same industry or trade, general strikes in the city in which the conflict had arisen, sabotage of the workplace, and in some cases, boycott by all of the workers of the products of the firm of the employer involved.

Anarchist direct action had no place for any intervention of the state in labor management relations. For one thing, the anarchist labor movement was philosophically committed to the eventual elimination of the state as the institution that was the source of all inequalities and injustices of the existing social system. In the second place, the anarchists held that any intervention by the state would inevitably be on behalf of the employer.

Anarchosyndicalists of all kinds believed in this kind of direct action. However, there were different tendencies within the movement. One source of disagreement was the question of whether or not organized labor should be committed to the ultimate establishment of anarchist communism. This was the belief, incorporated into its statement of principle, of the Argentine anarchist federation, the *Federación Obrera Regional Argentina* (FORA), and its lead was followed by some other national anarchist labor groups. However, others, such as the *Confederação Operária do Brasil* (COB), did not make any such ideological commitment.

Another point of disagreement was over the question of whether or not the unions should have fulltime paid leaders. Here again, the FORA took the extreme position, arguing that paid union officials living at the cost of union members were in fact exploiting those members. Once more, the COB did not agree with FORA's position—nor did the *Federación Obrera Regional Uruguay* (FORU).

There was also disagreement over how to interpret the anarchist commitment to autonomy of those belonging to the movement. It was, in general terms, agreed that the individual was autonomous within the union. The union was autonomous within whatever federation it might belong to, and the federation was autonomous within any central labor group with which it was affiliated.

However, within Latin America there were two divergent interpretations of autonomy. Most of the national anarchist labor groups were very critical of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the anarchosyndicalist central labor group in the United States. It had created a pattern whereby all of the country's workers would be divided into national industrial unions that together constituted the IWW. It also preached that after the revolution that would bring the triumph of the workers, these national industrial unions would take control of their respective parts of the economy.<sup>2</sup>

In at least two Latin American countries, Mexico and Chile, there had developed anarchist unions patterned after a more or less loose association with the IWW of the United States. However, many other anarchist union groups denied that the Industrial Workers of the World was a genuine anarchist labor movement, arguing that it was too centralized, and did not provide the autonomy of the individual and the various levels of organization that were a key part of the anarchist philosophy.

## **EFFORTS TO UNITE LATIN AMERICAN ANARCHOSYNDICALISTS**

Most of the first national central labor organizations to be established in Latin America were anarchosyndicalist in orientation. Clearly, the most influential of these was the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina, founded in 1901. To a large degree it dominated Argentine organized labor during the first decade of the 20th century.

The prestige of FORA outside of Argentina was seen in the names of several of the other Latin American anarchist-oriented central labor groups. There were, for instance, the Federación Obrera Regional Uruguaya, the Federación Obrera Regional Peruana and the Centro Obrero Regional del Paraguay, and even the Confederación Obrera Regional Mexicana (which soon lost all contact with anarchosyndicalism).

However, by no means all of the anarchist central labor bodies followed FORA's lead insofar as their names were concerned. There was the Confederación General de Trabajadores, established in Mexico in 1921, and an organization of the same name in Chile that was organized in the mid-1930s, as well as the Confederação Operária Brasileira. There were also, as we have noted, union groups patterned after the IWW of the United States in both Mexico and Chile.

Understandably, the Latin American anarchist-led union groups sought to establish and maintain links among themselves. This proved relatively feasible on a country-by-country basis. There were close relations between the Confederação Operária Brasileira and the FORA and the FORU, and between the Argentine and Peruvian anarchist labor movements.<sup>3</sup>

However, it was much more difficult to develop and continue relations among the anarchist-inclined labor groups on a hemispheric basis. For one thing, their financial resources were almost always very limited—in

part as a direct result of anarchist aversion to bureaucracy and exploitation of their members by the labor organizations themselves. For another, frequent persecution made it difficult to maintain enduring contacts with fraternal organizations on a hemispheric basis.

In 1909, FORA sent out a call for a continental congress of anarchist labor groups to be held in Buenos Aires. Acceptances were received from organizations in Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay.<sup>4</sup> However, this meeting was never held, because of public disturbances connected with the celebration of the centenary in 1910 of Argentine independence, which resulted in the temporary outlawing of FORA.<sup>5</sup> It was not until 1929 that a successful effort was made to hold a Latin America-wide anarchosyndicalist congress and establish a hemispheric organization.

The Latin American anarchist labor union leaders had slightly more success in organizing hemispheric meetings of workers' organizations of particular crafts or industries. There was apparently such a conference of transport workers in October 1905.<sup>6</sup>

Anarchist maritime transport workers also participated in at least two American regional conferences in the mid-1920s, in which there were also Communist delegates. These were the First International Congress of the Maritime Transport Workers of the Western Hemisphere, held in New Orleans in March 1925, and a second meeting held in Montevideo, Uruguay, in March 1926.

The second of these congresses was presided over by Alberto Bengoa, representing the Department of Marine Transport Workers of the IWW of Chile, at a time when the IWW largely dominated that country's organized maritime workers. Other delegates represented unions in Brazil and Uruguay, as well as fraternal delegates from the Russian Transport Workers Union and the Red International of Labor Unions. For some unexplained reason, the Argentine FORA was not represented at this meeting.

The minutes of this conference indicated that there was a certain tension between anarchist and Communist delegates. Various resolutions concerning working conditions of seamen and port employees were adopted, with the Communist-oriented delegates apparently making some concessions to the anarchists on resolutions that the latter deemed to be too political.<sup>7</sup>

## ESTABLISHMENT OF ACAT

The founding congress of the Asociación Continental Americana de Trabajadores was finally held in Buenos Aires in May 1929. By the time the meeting was held anarchosyndicalist dominance in the labor movement of the Latin American countries no longer existed. This was due to various factors. For one thing, the nature of the labor movement in many of the countries had changed considerably. Increasing numbers of union members were working for factories that employed scores and even hundreds



of workers, and it had become necessary to establish rules of procedure for handling relations between the firm and the union. To establish such rules in a unionized firm, collective bargaining was necessary. So workers were inclined to choose a leadership that was willing to bargain with the employer and did not regard such bargaining as despised class collaboration.

In addition, by the 1920s, political parties had begun to develop that had sympathy for the labor movement, were willing to fight for its rights and for improvement of the workers' working and living conditions, and were seeking to gain influence in and even control the trade unions.

The 1929 meeting was the culmination of at least two frustrated efforts to bring together representatives of all of the Latin American anarchosyndicalist labor groups. The Argentine anarchist newspaper *La Protesta* sketched these unsuccessful attempts to launch a hemispheric anarcho-syndicalist organization:

After a circular dispatched by the F.O.R.A. to the organizations of the continent and the efforts of the C.G. de Trabajadores of Mexico, the latter convoked a Conference of organizations for the first of May 1925 in Panama. A conference that failed because the Yankee imperialists forced the government of that country to launch strong repression. There was a later effort that also failed. That was the Conference that was summoned in Buenos Aires in May 1927 which was attended only by representatives of the F.O.R.A., the F.O.R.U., the C.O. Regional of Paraguay and a delegate of some organizations of Brazil. Its failure was due also to the profound reaction through which America was passing.<sup>8</sup>

When the long-awaited continental congress of anarchosyndicalist national labor movements finally met in Buenos Aires in May 1929 there were three delegates present from the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina; two from Centro Obrero Regional del Paraguay, and one delegate each from the Federación Obrera Local of La Paz, Bolivia, and the Confederación General de Trabajadores de México. A Brazilian delegate represented local union groups in Uruguay, and the Comité Pro Acción Sindical of Guatemala was also represented by one delegate. Finally, there were indirect delegates from the Agrupación Obrera de Estudios Sociales de San José, Costa Rica, the newspaper *La Protesta* of Lima, the magazine *Cultura Proletaria* of New York, and the "La Antorcha" and "Luz y Libertad" anarchist groups of La Paz, Bolivia.

The first day of the meeting was taken up in large part with reports by the various delegates about the situation in their respective countries. The hope was also expressed that if "[t]he same thinking inspires the comrades who work to overcome the crisis of ideas and propaganda resulting from the dictatorships which continue to coerce the people of Chile, Peru and Colombia," there would soon be affiliates in those countries.<sup>9</sup>

The conference declared the Asociación Continental Americana de los Trabajadores (ACAT) to be in existence, and adopted a declaration of



principles for that organization. The declaration proclaimed that: "[a] social regime based on the common work of free associations of free producers excludes the State that has always been the instrument of domination by a parasitical caste of class to the detriment of the productive masses and that loses its reason for existence when economic leveling, the expropriation of the ex-proprietors, has established the equality of all human beings in life, in terms of the instruments of labor and the enjoyment of its products."

The ACAT declaration of principles then set forth the methods of labor struggle of which it approved. It proclaimed that "its actions must be in agreement with revolutionary doctrine. Thus, the methods of struggle of the A.C.A.T. and of the organizations that constitute it, the partial and general strike, sabotage and the boycott in the cases in which it is necessary to carry out solidarity beyond national boundaries."

In conformity with anarchist philosophy, the ACAT declaration of principles said that "official arbitration and intervention in settlement of controversies between capital and labor are rejected. Consequently, the policy of class collaboration will be rejected, and the labor organizations signing this pact of solidarity will combat legislative projects which, in the various countries, tend to make obligatory the intervention of the State in strikes and other social conflicts."

Furthermore, it proclaimed that "the Asociación Continental Americana de los Trabajadores declares its opposition to all politics and rejects all agreement of alliance with parties that accept class collaboration and with trade union sectors that act within the sphere of the State, whether parliamentary or dictatorial."

The declaration of principles also endorsed the traditional anarchist insistence on federalism as the principle of union organization. It stated that "the basis of libertarian labor organizations is federalism. Individuals join voluntarily in the union, the unions form federations and together they constitute the national organism. From bottom to top is established the union of the proletariat, conserving for the individual, as well as the member, his autonomy within the international of the workers." Finally, the declaration asserted, "As aspiration for the future, the A.C.A.T. recommends anarchist communism."<sup>10</sup>

The founding congress of ACAT was very critical of the Industrial Workers of the World of the United States. *La Protesta* explained that "America is a vast continent that is divided, not only in different political zones but also in geographic zones that differ in ethnography and in social progress. In the far north there exists the most advanced form of modern capitalism...and in the south there has begun to appear, we may say, the same phenomenon in the industrial cities, while in the center of the continent there persists the characteristic feature of the colony, both in economic backwardness and lack of popular culture."

The article continued, "Circumstances associated with this process of differentiation soon separated from the libertarian labor movement the

workers who, particularly in the United States, organize themselves following the rhythm of industrialism. Therefore, the A.C.A.T. is constituted without the participation of the I.W.W. which rejects federalist practices and opposes internationalism, [and] results in nothing more than innocuous reformism."<sup>11</sup>

*La Protesta* also claimed that "Federalism is the antithesis of centralism. The IWW, following the North American case, aspires to create a new international, putting aside the national federal organizations. They carry out from top down the internationalization of the labor movement even though they recognize the sections' right to certain administrative and functional autonomy. Thus the proposition declared by the inspirers of this industrialist tendency is irreconcilable with the spiritual reality represented by the Asociación Continental Americana de los Trabajadores."<sup>12</sup>

After some discussion, the congress decided that the permanent structure of ACAT would consist of a three-person secretariat, whose members would be chosen by the congress itself, and a Council. The latter would have "as many members as there were national organizations belonging to the Continental." Both the secretariat and the committee would reside in the city in which the headquarters of ACAT was located.<sup>13</sup>

Among those attending the congress was Augustin Souchy, the secretary of the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA), the global anarchosyndicalist international. He delivered a speech at the opening session of the meeting and from time to time contributed to the debates during the various sessions. The congress decided that ACAT would be affiliated with the IWMA.<sup>14</sup>

## ACAT'S HISTORY

The history of the Asociación Continental Americana de los Trabajadores was a fitful one. Although Diego de Santillán claimed that ACAT "quickly won the adhesion of the revolutionary workers of 13 countries in the continent,"<sup>15</sup> the organizations that had participated in organizing it in 1929 faced increasing difficulties in succeeding years, making it exceedingly hard not only to maintain a functioning continental anarchosyndicalist union group, but even to keep in existence the national organizations that had joined in founding ACAT.

In the cases of Argentina and Brazil there were governmental changes in 1930 that severely affected the anarchosyndicalist labor movements in those countries. A military coup in Argentina, where ACAT had its headquarters, in September 1930 brought to power a regime that was generally hostile to the labor movement, and particularly toward the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina. In Brazil a month later there was a revolution that installed in the presidency Getúlio Vargas, who in succeeding years followed a dual policy of sponsoring a government which recognized and authorized labor movements, and crushing the movements that had

existed before he came to power—bringing about the disappearance of virtually all anarchosyndicalist unions.

The Confederación General de Trabajadores of Mexico which, together with FORA, had been a major participant in the founding congress of ACAT, underwent an experience somewhat similar to that of the Brazilian anarchosyndicalist union groups. For most of the 1920s, it had been the principal opponent of the government-favored Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana. In 1931 the Mexican government of President Ortiz Rubio enacted a labor code that required government recognition of a union for it to function effectively. The impact of that law was catastrophic so far as the CGT was concerned.

John M. Hart, the historian of Mexican anarchism, wrote:

Within a year the CGT had divided into at least four major parts. Some of the dissidents... had already given up on anarchosyndicalism as 'unrealistic.' One of them, Jacinto Huitrón had not.... For the remainder of his life, into the late 1960s, he led the Mexican Anarchist Federation (Federación Anarquista Mexicana—FAM). The FAM was the only significant anarchosyndicalist survival of the CGT, but was small, composed of only individual members.... Its consistent opposition to the cooperation of the leadership of organized labor with the government had minimal effect on the Mexican working class.<sup>16</sup>

In Guatemala, General Jorge Ubico seized power in 1931, establishing a dictatorship that almost entirely suppressed that country's nascent labor movement. After the Ubico regime was overthrown in 1944, and the labor movement was revived, none of the new unions that then appeared was under anarchist leadership.

In 1932 Bolivia and Paraguay entered the so-called Chaco War, which in both cases resulted in a virtual suppression of the labor movement so long as the conflict continued. When peace returned and the labor movement was revived in Paraguay, the leadership of the anarchosyndicalists was largely superseded by that of the Communists and the new Febrerista Party founded after the end of the war. In the case of Bolivia, the anarchosyndicalists continued, until the National Revolution in 1952, to be of considerable significance in and around La Paz, the capital city.

Under these conditions, the Asociación Continental Americana de los Trabajadores never became an effective international organization. For a short while it published a monthly magazine entitled *La Continental*, which reportedly was distributed without charge to some 10,000 comrades and groups.<sup>17</sup> For a few years ACAT's headquarters issued a proclamation about events in various parts of the hemisphere that had more symbolic than real significance. For instance, in July 1932 it issued a proclamation denouncing "a horrendous massacre of Indian workers" in the vicinity of Cuzco, Peru by the dictatorship of President Sánchez Cerro.<sup>18</sup>

Then, in January 1933, ACAT issued a proclamation denouncing a Latin American "antiwar conference" in Montevideo as a machination of the Communist International, and proclaimed: "The Secretariat of the A.C.A.T.

considers that the proletariat cannot be the instrument of a policy of a party that functions under the inspiration of the Russian government and warns against the maneuver that uses the suggestive motive of the struggle against war. The Congress that organized in Montevideo cannot have any other results...than supporting and strengthening the power of the Communist Party in Russia and facilitating the area of Bolshevik penetration in all the countries."<sup>19</sup>

The French anarchist newspaper *Le Libertaire* described the difficulties faced by ACAT in the years immediately following its establishment. It wrote, "The dictatorship of General Uriburu put an end in the following year to the activity of ACAT on Argentine soil; the secretariat was transferred to Montevideo, Uruguay...The magazine continued to appear until 1941 under the title *La Continental*, but with great difficulties."

ACAT apparently gave up the ghost during World War II. However, in 1948 the Argentine FORA, according to *Le Libertaire*, held a "reorganization congress" during which a Provisional International Secretariat was chosen that issued a call for a new congress of ACAT in January 1949. It received favorable responses to this call from anarchosyndicalist groups in Chile, Cuba, Ecuador and Peru.<sup>20</sup>

However, the January 1949 congress was not held. In September of that year, the Libertarian Association of Cuba organized a reception for Liberto Forti of the Argentine FORA, who was in Havana in connection with "the effort to reorganize the Asociación Continental Americana de Trabajadores."<sup>21</sup>

Apparently no second congress of ACAT was ever held as a result of these efforts of FORA. However, in February 1960, what had been the periodical of ACAT, *La Continental*, was revived, with the note that it was issue Number 1 of Year 1 of the "Third Epoch." It proclaimed, under the heading "Our Aspirations," that

[s]ince epistolary relations have been normalized with the comrades and organizations of the Continent after such a prolonged silence imposed by the diverse tyrannies that oppressed it and that still continue in many countries, and in the interest of fulfilling our aspirations for the reestablishment of what was the ASOCIACIÓN CONTINENTAL AMERICANA DE LOS TRABAJADORES (A.C.A.T.), its Secretariat, made up [at] the present time [of] representatives of the Uruguayan FOR and the Argentine FOR, overcoming difficulties of all sorts, places in circulation once again its periodical, following the line of conduct, of orientation, doctrine and tactics approved in the Continental Constituent Assembly that met in May 1929.

This long article noted that generally the Latin American labor movements "have fallen within the state's orbit and consequently their orientation and struggles are circumscribed by the reformist measures of collaboration with the State." It then declared:

Faced with the situation of disorganization, and for the purpose of generating relations so that in the immediate future there will be a tendency to create workers'

organisms that can be the base for establishing this association, we exhort the comrades and sympathizers to make efforts to contribute toward making feasible the regular appearance of this periodical that has to fulfill in the necessary degree the creation of a climate, and foment among the workers and the people the aspiration of transforming this regime of injustice.... Fully conscious of the significance of this effort, we hope to encounter the comrades and sympathizers necessary to fulfill our work; the future is ours, on our efforts, sacrifices and perseverance depends the immediate future. Forward then."

It ends "Viva La Continental! Viva Anarchist Communism!"<sup>22</sup>

We have no indication of what, if anything, followed from this effort to revive ACAT. However, it is clear that by the post World War II period, anarchosindicalist influence in the labor movements of Latin America had become all but nonexistent.

## NOTES

1. Julio Godio, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Latinoamericano: Anarquistas y Socialistas 1850-1918*, 2nd ed. (México: Editorial Nueva Imagen 1983), p. 60.

2. See Paul Brissenden, *The IWW: A Study of American Syndicalism* (NY: Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, 1919).

3. Diego Abad de Santillán, *La FORA: Ideología y Trayectoria del Movimiento Obrero Revolucionario en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nervio, 1933), p. 300.

4. *Mother Earth* (New York), April 1909.

5. Abad de Santillán, *La FORA*, p. 300.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

7. *Solidaridad*, Spanish monthly of IWW, Chicago, May 1926.

8. *La Protesta* (Buenos Aires), May 4, 1929.

9. *La Protesta*, May 14, 1929.

10. *La Protesta*, May 16, 1929.

11. *La Protesta*, May 17, 1929.

12. *La Protesta*, May 16, 1929.

13. *La Protesta*, May 19, 1929.

14. *La Protesta*, May 14, 1929.

15. Abad de Santillán, *La FORA*, p. 302.

16. John M. Hart, *Anarchism & The Mexican Working Class, 1860-1931* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), pp. 176-77.

17. *Le Libertaire* (Paris), August 27, 1948.

18. *La Protesta*, July 2, 1932.

19. *La Protesta*, January 13, 1933.

20. *Le Libertaire*, August 27, 1948.

21. Letter addressed to "Estimado Compañero" from Comité Coordinador General de la Asociación Libertaria de Cuba, September 30, 1949.

22. *La Continental* (Buenos Aires), February 1960.

## CHAPTER 2

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# The Pan American Federation of Labor

The first serious attempt to establish an international labor organization, incorporating unions of both Latin America and the United States, was the Pan American Federation of Labor (PAFL). Formally established in 1918, it was an organization that was to a large degree dominated by two men—Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Luis Morones of the Mexican Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM). The fact that its effective life was only about a decade was due in part to the death of the first of these and the decreasing influence in Mexican organized labor of the second.

### SAMUEL GOMPERS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE PAFL

Before Samuel Gompers acquired the position of virtually permanent president of the American Federation of Labor, he had worked as a cigar maker. In that job, he had labored alongside of (among others) Cuban workers, many of whom were living in exile because of their support for the struggle for independence in their native island. Gompers developed strong sympathy for that struggle from his contacts with these workers. This sympathy was reflected in a resolution of the 1896 convention of the AF of L that “endorsed the demands of the Cuban revolutionists.” Then, “[a]fter the Spanish-American War, the AF of L demanded ‘freedom and independence’ for Cuba.”<sup>1</sup>

In his capacity as president of the AFL, Gompers also became concerned with two other Spanish-speaking neighbors of the United States, Puerto Rico and Mexico. As a consequence of the Spanish-American War, Puerto

Rico came under U.S. control. Then, in 1900, Santiago Iglesias, a Spanish immigrant to Puerto Rico who, in the last years of Spanish control, had begun the work of establishing a labor movement in the island, presented to the AFL's annual convention a report on labor conditions there under U.S. military occupation, which he described as "oppressive." In the following year, the Free Federation of Workers of Puerto Rico, which Iglesias had organized, was accepted into the American Federation of Labor, and in 1902 it sent delegates to the AFL's annual convention for the first time.<sup>2</sup>

Gompers clearly had a personal interest in the labor movement in Puerto Rico, and the fate of the island's people under U.S. domination. He made at least two trips there, using the visits to become acquainted with the situation of the island's workers and the progress of their unions, as well as learning at first hand about political and economic conditions.

Gompers, for the AFL, was to play a significant role in winning passage through the U.S. Congress of the 1917 Jones Law, which granted U.S. citizenship to the residents of Puerto Rico, and gave at least the beginnings of home rule to the island's people. Gompers was particularly important in having universal adult suffrage written into the Jones Law.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of Mexico, Gompers's interest was also apparently aroused when he worked alongside Mexican immigrant cigar makers who were exiles from the oppressive regime of Porfirio Díaz. Thereafter, he maintained his concern for the struggle of Mexican workers against the Díaz dictatorship. Sinclair Snow noted:

Many years later, after he had become a person of prominence in American life, more and more representatives of the Mexican revolutionary movement came to confer with him. Among others, he was in touch with Ricardo Flores Magón, the leader of the Mexican Liberal party, which had established headquarters in the United States in 1904. In 1907, when Flores Magón and other leaders of the Liberal party were arrested by U.S. authorities, Gompers was instrumental in preventing their extradition to Mexico.... At the Denver convention of the American Federation of Labor in 1908, Gompers was successful in getting his followers to adopt a resolution demanding the freedom of Ricardo Flores Magón, Antonio I. Villarreal and Librado Rivera, the leaders of the Mexican Liberal party who had been imprisoned in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Lewis Lorwin suggested that there were some considerations of self-interest, as well as feelings of labor solidarity, which stimulated the interest of Gompers and other AFL leaders in the problems of Mexican workers. He wrote, "A number of American trade unions were concerned about the immigration of low-paid and semi-servile Mexican laborers into the border states of the South West. Convinced that the condition of Mexican labor was the result of the Díaz dictatorship, they lent support to the political parties or 'juntas' which were fighting against Díaz. John Murray, a member of the International Typographical Union, took up the cause of the Liberal Party of Mexico with zeal, and aroused Gompers' enthusiasm



for it.”<sup>5</sup> John Murray was, like Santiago Iglesias, to play a significant role in the history of the Pan American Federation of Labor.

Once the Mexican Revolution began, and Porfirio Díaz was forced into exile, the American Federation of Labor and Samuel Gompers strongly supported the movement. They worked to counteract the influence of U.S. individuals and firms who had made heavy investments in Mexico under Porfirio Díaz and now sought to stimulate U.S. government armed intervention to try to suppress the Revolution.

## MEXICAN BACKGROUND OF FORMATION OF PAFL

During the early years of the Mexican Revolution there were several factors that impeded the formation of a solid alliance between the American Federation of Labor and the Mexican labor movement. These were both ideological and organizational.

Since the first emergence of an organized labor movement in Mexico in the wake of the Liberal Revolution of the 1850s and 1860s, the principal ideological strains within it had been anarchosyndicalist and Marxist, particularly the former. Although the labor movement that grew up in that Liberal era had been largely destroyed under Porfirio Díaz, when a militant workers' movement appeared again during the last years of the Díaz dictatorship, it too was largely anarchosyndicalist in its political orientation. A number of the new Mexican trade union leaders had received their first experience with organized labor as members of the anarchosyndicalist Industrial Workers of the World while living in exile in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, Samuel Gompers and other men associated with him in the leadership of the American Federation of Labor were, by the time of the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, very strongly opposed to left-wing ideologies, whether of Marxist or anarchist varieties. They fought them domestically with great vigor, being particularly violent against the IWW.

However, to a considerable degree, Gompers was willing, at least for the time being, to overlook, in the name of class solidarity, what he undoubtedly regarded as the grave political errors of the leaders of the new Mexican labor movement. A more serious problem, until 1918, shortly before the founding of the Pan American Federation of Labor, was the dispersion of the Mexican labor movement. In the early years of the Mexican Revolution, local unions had appeared in many parts of the country. The nearest thing to a national labor legislation was the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker), which was largely centered in and around Mexico City, and had only very loose control, if any, over organizations using its name and claiming membership in the Casa in other parts of the country.

The labor leader who was to succeed in uniting most of the Mexican trade union movement into a central labor organization was Luis Morones.



He had emerged as the leader of the electrical workers of Mexico City, and had been quite militant in the early years of the Revolution, at one time being threatened with execution by President Venustiano Carranza for an announcement of a strike that would shut down the electricity supply of the capital in a labor dispute.

However, Morones was also a man of considerable charisma and political talent. He succeeded in gathering around himself a number of other union leaders who came to be known as the Grupo de Acción (Action Group), which joined in the organization of a national central labor body, the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM), which for a decade largely dominated the country's organized labor movement. Morones was a willing, if sometimes difficult, partner with Samuel Gompers in forming and maintaining the Pan American Federation of Labor.

## **EXPANDING CONTACTS BETWEEN AFL AND MEXICAN ORGANIZED LABOR**

Between 1915 and 1918, extensive contacts were developed between the leadership of the American Federation of Labor, particularly Samuel Gompers, and various elements in the Mexican labor movement. Several people played roles in this growing rapprochement.

Of primary significance on the AFL side was Santiago Iglesias, of whom Sinclair Snow noted, "Despite the social vision of Iglesias, Gompers held him in high esteem and for many years depended upon him as his chief aide and spokesman in Latin American and especially Caribbean affairs."<sup>7</sup> Through Iglesias, Gompers was also put in touch with John Murray, Quaker of Socialist inclinations, who had for many years had close connections with Mexican Liberal Party exiles in the United States and as a journalist had made two expanded trips to revolutionary Mexico, where he had come to know many of the leaders of the country's burgeoning new labor movement, and had become convinced of the need for an alliance between the AFL and the Mexican unions. Santiago Iglesias brought about a meeting between Murray and Gompers, as a result of which Gompers "immediately accepted Murray as his chief aide and advisor in Mexican affairs, and Murray easily convinced him, as he had convinced Iglesias, that the AFL should enter into some kind of formal alliance with Mexican labor."<sup>8</sup>

By this time, most of the Mexican labor organizations had aligned themselves with Venustiano Carranza, head of the so-called "constitutionalist" faction among the contending political and military forces contesting for power. They appealed to Gompers to use his influence with President Woodrow Wilson to have the United States recognize Carranza as the legitimate president of Mexico. Gompers did so, sending a letter to the president to that effect. Snow noted that "to what extent Wilson was

influenced by Gompers is open to debate, but less than a month later the United States gave *de facto* recognition to the Carranza government."<sup>9</sup>

It is clear that the support that Gompers and the AFL gave to the Carranza regime was of very great importance for that regime. Bernard Mandel noted that the Carranza government "depended for favorable publicity in the United States primarily on the A.F. of L., the socialist *Call*, and a few other publications."<sup>10</sup>

However, Pancho Villa, still resisting the Carranza regime, executed several U.S. citizens whom he held prisoner, and soon afterward conducted raids across the United States border, which President Wilson countered by sending an expeditionary force headed by General John Pershing into northern Mexico in a futile effort to hunt down Villa. When Carranza, as well as Villa, opposed this invasion, and constitutionalist troops in fact clashed with those of Pershing, resulting in details and wounded men on both sides, as well as taking 22 U.S. soldiers as prisoners, there was fear of an open war between the two countries. Samuel Gompers wired Carranza, appealing for release of the prisoners, and Carranza "wired Gompers of the steps in this direction that had been taken."<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, Gompers, after extensive consultations with Santiago Iglesias and John Murray, had come to the conclusion that there should be a meeting between members of the AFL leadership and that of the Mexican labor movement. As a consequence, he "formally called for a meeting of representatives of the American Federation of Labor, the Casa del Obrero Mundial, and as many other organizations of Mexican labor as possible."<sup>12</sup>

Such a meeting finally took place in Washington, DC, early in July 1916. On the U.S. side were Samuel Gompers, John Murray and 10 of the AFL Executive Council. The Mexican delegation was headed by Luis Morones, then head of the Federación de Sindicatos Obreros of Mexico City; Salvador González García, a leader from Yucatan; Edmundo E. Martínez, a leader of the labor movement in Vera Cruz; and Baltazar Pagés, "a wandering Spaniard of anarchist tendencies" then also active in the union movement in Yucatan.<sup>13</sup>

This conference concentrated particularly on two things. These were the avoidance of war between the United States and Mexico, and the possibility of expanding the cordial relations between the AFL and the Mexican labor movement into a hemispheric trade union organization including the AFL and the labor movements of all of the Latin American countries. Those participating in the conference issued a statement at the end of their session setting forth these ideas.

With regard to the first problem, the statement said that

we, the representatives of the organized workers, having the right to speak for all of the workers, and in the interests of all of the people, urge upon our governments

the appointment of a commission to be composed of high-minded citizens, fully representative of our nations, to consider differences that have brought our nations to the verge of war, and to make such recommendations for adjustment as shall fittingly express the highest ideals of the great rank and file of the citizenship of our two countries.

After saying that their meeting would contribute to bettering relations between the United States and Mexico, the statement said that it "should be followed by another more generally representative for the purpose of agreeing upon plans for maintaining permanent relations and for the federation of the labor movements of all the countries of the two Americas." However, it added, "In view of the present relations between the United States and Mexico, we are of the opinion that the holding of such a conference should be deferred until later in the year."<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after this conference, Samuel Gompers published a front-page article about it in the AFL's monthly magazine *American Federationist*, noting the problems with which it had dealt. He stressed that in view of the decision of the U.S. Congress to establish a "High Commission to visit the countries in the Pan-American Union" with a view of "promoting closer relations between the Pan-American countries," he had suggested that there ought to be labor representatives on such a commission. He gave no indication that this suggestion was accepted by the secretary of the treasury, who was to appoint the commission.<sup>15</sup>

Gompers published in this article a letter he had given to some Yucatan labor leaders who had been commissioned to travel elsewhere in Latin America to sound out the ground for establishment of a Pan American workers' federation. It included the statement that a "Pan-American Federation of Labor is not only possible but is necessary. It will constitute a ready and fit agency for injecting into international deliberations at opportune and critical times consideration for human rights, interests and welfare."<sup>16</sup>

Gompers' article ended on an interesting note. Indicating that he was very much aware that his Mexican counterparts had a very different political and trade union philosophy from that which he and most of the top leaders of the AFL believed in, Gompers wrote:

From the very beginning of our efforts to promote this Pan-American Federation of Labor our fundamental principle must be thoroughly understood. We in the United States concede to Mexico and the people of Mexico the right to work out their own problems according to their own ideals and in accord with their needs and the conditions that exist. We must insist upon the same right for the United States. The American trade union movement must have the sole right to determine the affairs of the American trade union movement. Just as it will be party to no movement to enforce American thought and American institution upon other peoples, so it can not permit the theories of any other American country to dominate, minimize or change the principles of the American labor movement.<sup>17</sup>

## THE FOUNDING OF THE PAN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

Although Samuel Gompers indicated in his article the hope that the new Pan American Federation of Labor would be founded within a few months of the meeting between the American and Mexican union leaders in Washington in early July 1916, that was not destined to be the case. At the time of the Washington meeting, relations between the United States and German governments were getting increasingly difficult, and in April 1917 Congress declared war on the Kaiser's Reich. Thereafter, the attention of Gompers and other AFL leaders tended to be largely concentrated on wartime affairs, and the founding of a hemispheric labor organization was postponed.

However, at the AFL's annual convention in November 1916, Gompers had received authorization to name a Pan American Federation of Labor Conference Committee, to work toward formation of the new organization. Gompers himself was named chairman of this committee, and John Murray its secretary. Santiago Iglesias and Carlos Loveira were the other members.

The first action of this new committee was to issue a Manifesto, published on February 9, 1917, in both Spanish and English. It started out noting heavy investment of North American and European capitalists in Latin America, and said: "If the employers, the capitalists of Pan-America thus unite for the protection of their common advantage, it becomes all the more evident that the wage earners of these countries must also unite for their common protection and betterment." The Manifesto also stated what the purpose of the Pan American Federation would be (as paraphrased by Sinclair Snow): "to permeate the Western Hemisphere with a humane influence; and the influence of the Pan American Federation of Labor would more truly represent the sentiments of the American people than would the influence of the business corporations." It also listed specific aims that the PAFL would seek to fulfill: "higher wages, shorter workdays, safe and sanitary working conditions, better homes, better surroundings, protection of children, prohibition of child labor, right of association, right of free assemblage, right of free speech, right of free press, and the right to strike."<sup>18</sup>

However, after the publication of this Manifesto, the members of the Conference Committee were diverted to other activities that gave them little time to be concerned with the Committee's work. As we have noted, Samuel Gompers came to concentrate most of his time and energy on World War I problems after the U.S. entry into that conflict in April 1917. Santiago Iglesias had to return to Puerto Rico to lead a major strike of sugar workers there, which brought about the recognition of the union by the landlords and the establishment of collective bargaining in that key part of the island's economy.

Although John Murray and Carlos Loveira continued the work of the Committee, and during the months that followed they carried on an extensive propaganda campaign by means of correspondence and the press, they too were soon diverted from the work of the Conference Committee. Murray became involved with a strike of Mexican miners in Arizona in the summer of 1917,<sup>19</sup> and Carlos Loveira was summoned back to Yucatan in December 1917, thus ending his direct participation in planning for the founding meeting of the PAFL.<sup>20</sup> Although three other people, the Mexican unionist Edmundo Martínez, Antonio Correa of Cuba, and Cardenio González of Chile, were supposedly added to the Committee, they seem in fact to have had little activity connected with it.<sup>21</sup>

Before the effective breaking up of the Conference Committee, it did two other things in addition to those already noted. It published a pamphlet entitled "*El Movimiento Obrero de los Estados Unidos*," written by Carlos Loveira and Baltazar Pagés, which was "a brief statement of the aims, ideals, purposes, structure and general policy of the American Federation of Labor." According to Sinclair Snow, "The object of the pamphlet was to stimulate Latin American trade union organization according to the Gompers philosophy and to counteract the philosophy of the anarchist and socialists which normally prevailed among Spanish-speaking trade unionists."

The Committee also developed a questionnaire, which was sent to labor leaders in various parts of Latin America, to establish contact, and hopefully arouse interest in the proposed Pan American labor federation. According to Snow,

[t]he questionnaire contained six questions: 1. What is your opinion regarding the fundamental issues presented in the Manifesto? 2. What influence would this international workers movement have among the workers in your region? 3. What charges or additions would you suggest be made to the issues raised in the Manifesto, and why? 4. When and where should the organizing conference be held, and on what do you base your reason? 5. What should be the subjects dealt with at the conference and what program for the conference would you suggest? 6. Can you send a delegate alone or in co-operation with other organizations?<sup>22</sup>

Active work toward founding the proposed hemispheric labor organization began again in April 1918. This renewed interest apparently originated in worries of Gompers and others about the pronounced neutralism of President Carranza in the World War that was then going on, and the hope that active work on the proposed Pan American Federation of Labor, which Carranza was thought to favor, might influence his adamant insistence on keeping out of the war. To this end, Charles A. Douglas, Carranza's representative in Washington, suggested to Gompers that he send an AFL delegation to Mexico to meet with Carranza and other Mexican political figures as well as with labor leaders, to discuss the establishment

of the Pan American federation. John Murray, Santiago Iglesias, and James Lord of the Mining Department of the AFL constituted this mission, which went to Mexico in early May 1918. The mission was received by Carranza, who, however, remained noncommittal. But it was greeted with enthusiasm by various leaders of the new *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana*, which had been established a few weeks before.

The upshot of this mission from the AFL was the dispatch to Washington of a mission of the new CROM, consisting of its secretary-general, Luis Morones, and the head of its federation in the Federal capital, Salvador Alvarez. They met in the AFL headquarters with members of the Executive Council of the AFL, particularly Samuel Gompers, and with John Murray and Santiago Iglesias.

The upshot of these conversations was the issuance of a statement to the effect that the international conference would be held in Laredo, Texas, beginning November 13, 1918. "At this conference, the labor movements of the United States and Mexico would be represented. . . . The questions to be considered would include the formation of the Pan American Federation of Labor . . . This was to be primarily an AFL-Mexican labor conference, although it would be a step toward the formation of the Pan-American Federation of Labor."<sup>23</sup>

However, the Laredo meeting turned out to be the founding convention of the Pan American Federation of Labor. As Sinclair Snow wrote, "The end of the war destroyed the secret aim of the organization, that is, the winning of Mexico for the Allies, but it made possible a return to the original goal of a federation of Pan American labor organizations which would counteract organized capital in the Western Hemisphere."<sup>24</sup>

There were 71 officially recorded delegates to this founding meeting of the PAFL. Forty-six came from the American Federation of Labor, and 21 "represented various Mexican unions." Interestingly enough, one of the Mexican delegates, Cayetano Pérez Ruíz, was recorded as representing the Industrial Workers of the World in Torreón, in the state of Coahuila. One delegate each was recorded as coming from labor groups in Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Colombia.<sup>25</sup>

The first two days of the congress were largely taken up with formalities, introductory speeches, and organizational matters. Proceedings began when delegations from the United States and those Latin American countries represented marched from the U.S. and Mexican sides respectively of the International Bridge between Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The delegations were led by Samuel Gompers and Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson (who personally represented President Wilson), and Luis Morones and General Pablo de la Garza (personal representative of President Carranza).

Then "[a]fter a short speech of welcome by Gompers, and appropriate remarks by Morones, Secretary Wilson, General de la Garza, and Nuevo Laredo's Mayor Francisco Pérez, the delegates, escorted by a U.S. Army



band and followed by a long train of labor unions, school children, and a battalion of the Thirty-seventh Infantry, marched to Jarvis Plaza in Laredo, where the leading speeches of the day were made."

These speeches on the introductory day of the founding congress of PAFL touched on issues that were implicit in the nature of the congress and that were to reappear during much of PAFL's existence. According to Sinclair Snow, "Secretary Wilson, speaking in the name of the President of the United States, made the keynote address. He briefly outlined the historical role of organized labor in the United States and by implication upheld the AFL as the model to be followed by trade unionists in Latin America."

Luis Morones in effect answered Secretary Wilson. He commented, "Let it not be supposed that, lacking respect, we have crossed the boundary line which divides the two countries to render vassalage to the powerful labor organization. No, that is not our mission. With regard to the American Federation of Labor, we have come to deal with it as one organization deals with another organization, and to discuss the far-reaching issues that directly affect the workers of Mexico and the workers of the United States."<sup>26</sup>

On the third day, the convention got down to the serious business before it: several policy resolutions that generated considerable controversy, and the formal establishment of the new hemispheric labor organization, about which there was little disagreement.

Particularly controversial was an extensive resolution introduced by the delegates from the CROM and the Federación de Sindicatos Obreros del Distrito Federal (referred to as Resolution 2), several parts of which generated very heated discussion. One protested against discrimination suffered by Mexican workers in the United States, and called on the AFL to use its influence against this mistreatment. One U.S. delegate suggested that the feeling against Mexican workers in the United States arose from their unwillingness to join unions at their workplaces, to which a Mexican replied that this unwillingness might be due to discrimination against Mexican workers by U.S. unions. This controversy was settled by agreeing to appoint a joint AFL-CROM committee to look into the problem, and also joint committees to be established at key border points "to aid migrating workers."<sup>27</sup>

Much more explosive was the Mexican delegates' proposal that measures be taken to find ways of freeing working men "who for various reasons, are deprived of their liberty in the jails of the United States." When it became clear in the discussion of the proposal that most of the "workers" involved were members of the IWW, there was strong objection by American delegates, led by Samuel Gompers who, as Sinclair Snow noted, "had been one of the persons responsible for the jailing of a large number of antiwar radicals." This measure was voted down by the convention.

Another segment of Resolution 2 that was voted down by the delegates was one banning any discussion of anything having to do with Mexico's

neutrality in World War I, and banning all "meddling" in internal matters in either Mexico or the United States. Samuel Gompers took advantage of that vote to introduce a motion in effect endorsing the peace terms that had been put forth by President Woodrow Wilson and endorsed by the AFL. Although there was strong opposition to this by Mexican delegates on the grounds that it did not deal with any problem peculiar to the organized workers, they finally agreed to vote for it "subject to ratification by their coworkers in Mexico."<sup>28</sup>

One other issue of consequence arose between the U.S. and Mexican delegates. This was the question of whether there should be exchange of union cards—that is, that members of a union in one country should be allowed automatically to become a member of the counterpart union in the other nation should they go to work there. In the process of debate on this issue, Luis Morones complained about discrimination by many U.S. unions against Mexicans seeking membership. William Green of the AFL, in his capacity as chairman of the resolutions committee of the convention, only argued that passage of this resolution was fruitless, since the AFL had no power to intervene concerning such matters in its constituent unions, and that one of the purposes of the Pan American Federation of Labor was to eliminate ill feelings between American workers and those of Mexico.<sup>29</sup>

The business of formally establishing the new hemispheric labor group aroused little or no controversy. A constitution for the organization was adopted providing, among other things, that there should be annual conventions of the new federation. Samuel Gompers was elected president of the new Pan American Federation of Labor, while two secretaries were also chosen: John Murray as English-language secretary, and Canuto A. Vargas, a leading member of the AFL's Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union, as Spanish-language secretary.<sup>30</sup>

## FURTHER CONVENTIONS OF THE PAFL

The Second Convention of the Pan American Federation of Labor met in New York City in July 1919. Twenty-six delegates were present accredited as coming from the United States, Mexico, Peru, Honduras, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. At least some of the delegates from countries other than the United States and Mexico in fact represented small groups of workers from those nations residing in the United States.

Some 30 resolutions were adopted by the Second Convention. Some of these dealt with matters that had also been discussed at the Founding Convention nine months before. One dealt with the postwar settlement of World War I. After Samuel Gompers reported on the limited success of his efforts, in accord with instructions from the First Convention of the PAFL, to get matters included in the peace treaty that dealt with labor, he



introduced a motion to endorse the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations Covenant included in it because they both called for establishment of what came to be the International Labor Organization (ILO). Luis Morones at first opposed Gompers' resolution, arguing that only those parts of it directly dealing with labor should be endorsed. However, he finally withdrew his objections when Gompers agreed to inclusion of a proviso that all countries should be permitted to join the League of Nations.

There was extensive debate on an issue that reflected the different states of development and customs of the U.S. labor movement and those of Latin America. The American Federation of Labor urged that henceforward only wage or salary earners should be delegates to PAFL conventions. Although Latin American delegates insisted that independent intellectuals played a key role in their emerging labor movement and that the organizations belonging to the PAFL should be free to elect whomever they wanted to represent them, Samuel Gompers insisted, in effect, that such intellectuals had no place in the labor movement. A resolution was finally passed providing that henceforward all PAFL convention delegates must be wage or salary earners and members of the union groups that they represented.

An extensive report on labor conditions in the Dominican Republic, which was then occupied by U.S. troops, was introduced, and it was voted to ask the AFL to study the situation "and take appropriate action." There was also some discussion of the so-called Tacna-Arica border dispute then pending between Peru and Chile, and a resolution was adopted urging that the question be settled peacefully, but leaving it up to the Executive Committee of the PAFL to suggest an appropriate solution.

Finally, the always pressing issue of migration, particularly of Mexican workers into the United States, arose. The AFL, in its most recent convention, had demanded a suspension of all immigration for several years, and when the issue was raised at the PAFL congress, Luis Morones presented a resolution that the AFL should explain the reasons for its position. When Gompers then did so, Morones "accepted Gompers' explanation and stated that his object in asking for clarification had been primarily to establish the principle that any member union of the PAFL which took action that appeared to be contrary to the spirit or principles of the Laredo Conference should be required to justify its action to the other members of the PAFL."

Sinclair Snow summed up the nature of the Second Convention of the Pan American Federation of Labor thus: "The Second Congress set the pattern for succeeding ones. It revealed a working alliance between Gompers and Morones which strengthened as time went by. The resolutions... reflected the philosophy of Gompers rather than that of the Latin American labor leader."<sup>31</sup>

The Third Congress met in January 1921,<sup>32</sup> about a month after General Álvaro Obregón became president of Mexico with strong support of

CROM. Sinclair Snow noted that the holding of the congress in Mexico City "emphasized PAFL support of the new government." He added, "Although a large amount of routine business was transacted, there was none of the dissension that had marked the two previous conventions. The success of Obregón had apparently left the delegates in a congenial and festive frame of mind."

One feature of this meeting was a session addressed by a number of people prominent in the labor movements represented at the congress. One of these was the famous "Mother Jones," who had played a significant role in the drive to organize the U.S. coal miners.

Several significant resolutions were passed at the Third Congress. One of these tended to negate the stand taken by Gompers at the Laredo convention in regard to the members of the IWW who were at the time in prison in the United States. The Congress sent New York State Governor Nathan Miller an appeal to pardon two Mexican members of the AFL Shipbuilders Lodge in Buffalo, New York, who were awaiting execution for a murder of which PAFL leaders felt they were innocent. Miller ignored the plea.<sup>33</sup>

One significant resolution of the Third Congress was to condemn the tyrannical rule of President Juan Vicente Gómez (sometimes called "the Tyrant of the Andes") in Venezuela. It called for aid to be given to the workers of that country who were fighting against the Gómez regime.<sup>34</sup>

The Fourth Congress of the Pan American Federation of Labor, which opened on December 3, 1924, was also held in Mexico City. Only delegations from the labor movements of five countries—the United States, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic—were present. There was also a fraternal delegation from Guatemala.

The first meetings of the congress featured several speeches and reports. These included an innovation, short talks by two representatives of the Trade Union Congress of Great Britain. There was also a report on the labor situation in the Dominican Republic.

Some 30 resolutions were passed by the Fourth Congress, 6 of which Sinclair Snow considered of major significance. One noted the presence of sizable numbers of workers in Panama who had originated in the British colonies of Jamaica and Barbados, and urged the governments of the United States and Great Britain to help deal with the problems of these workers. Another urged Latin American trade union groups to support the government of Mexican President Plutarco Elías Calles, who had recently taken office.

Another resolution called for a three-person union organizing committee with one member each from the United States, the Caribbean area and Mexico—to work in Central and South America, with the costs being provided by the American Federation of Labor and the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana. A fourth resolution brought up the old issue of the willingness of unions in both the AFL and the CROM to make membership automatically available to anyone coming from their counterparts

in the other country, and it was resolved that the AFL and CROM would "urge" their affiliated unions to do this.

The most strongly debated resolution was one condemning the treatment of organized labor by the governments of Central America. It proposed that a PAFL committee be sent to the Central American republics to gather information and to report on labor conditions there, and that the Fourth Congress itself demand the abolition of the death penalty in those republics. The resolutions committee recommended that this question be referred to the incoming Executive Committee of the PAFL, to which Thomas S. González, the fraternal delegate from Guatemala who had introduced the resolution, strongly protested. However, a CROM delegate insisted on adoption of the resolution committee's recommendation in a speech in which he cast aspersions on the union groups of Central America.

This was the last PAFL congress attended by Samuel Gompers. Although he presided over its opening session, he was too ill to attend the rest of them, and he died on the way home.<sup>35</sup>

The Fifth Congress of the PAFL, which proved to be the last one, met in Washington, DC, in July, 1927. There were delegates present from labor organizations in more countries than in any previous PAFL meeting: the United States, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Colombia, and Puerto Rico. In addition, greetings were read from groups in Argentina, Haiti, Chile, El Salvador, Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Germany, as well as from the International Federation of Trade Unions.<sup>36</sup> This meeting was presided over by William Green, who had succeeded Samuel Gompers as president of both the American Federation of Labor and the PAFL.

Some of the discussion at this congress received considerable publicity in the U.S. press. This was particularly the case with the debate over a resolution introduced by Ricardo A. Martínez, the delegate credited as representing the Venezuelan workers, although he was in fact a leader of a group of Venezuelan exiles in New York, the Unión Obrera Venezolana. His resolution was strongly supported by the Nicaraguan delegate Salomón de la Selva, one of the original Latin American participants in the PAFL.<sup>37</sup>

Martínez was in fact a member of the Communist Party of the United States, which he had joined soon after arriving in New York City. It was on the suggestion of the party leaders that he had sought representation, in the name of the Venezuelan workers, in the PAFL congress. He had received his credentials through the good offices of the Puerto Rican journalist Luis Muñoz Marín (many years later the four-time governor of Puerto Rico), who was working with Santiago Iglesias, the Spanish-language secretary of the PAFL.<sup>38</sup>

The Martínez-de la Selva resolution denounced in very strong language the Monroe Doctrine as an instrument through which U.S. capitalist

elements oppressed the workers of Latin America. Its fiery language aroused considerable opposition, headed by Matthew Woll of the AFL, and the resolutions committee, headed by Woll, brought forward a substitute resolve which, according to Sinclair Snow, "condemned the insistence of the U.S. government that American military power should be used to protect the property of American citizens in Latin America, and it supported the principle that the property of a foreigner in any Latin American country should be given protection equal to, but not greater than, that accorded a citizen of the country in question."<sup>39</sup>

Another matter of controversy at the Fifth Congress centered on the persecution of the Cuban labor movement by the dictatorship of President Gerardo Machado. The Cuban delegation introduced a motion that in effect exonerated the Machado regime of any mistreatment of the organized labor movement. Quite wisely, the resolutions committee recommended that this resolution be referred to the Executive Committee "for consideration," after which nothing more was heard about it.<sup>40</sup>

When it was time to elect a new leadership for the PAFL, Chester M. Wright, who had been serving for some time as the English-language secretary, presented his resignation, saying that there was not enough business to engage two different secretaries, and his resignation was accepted. Soon afterward, Ricardo Martínez sought to nominate Luis Morones for president, in place of William Green. Morones, however, demurred on the ground that he could not move to Washington, where the headquarters of the Pan American Federation of Labor was located. As a result, William Green was renamed as president, Morones as vice president, Santiago Iglesias as the lone secretary, and Matthew Woll as Treasurer.<sup>41</sup>

## THE PAFL AND THE MEXICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

To a considerable degree the Pan American Federation of Labor was a partnership between the American Federation of Labor and the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana. Much of its importance came from its role of providing substantial support in the United States for the Mexican Revolution and Mexican organized labor in a difficult period for both of them.

There were powerful elements in the United States that were hostile to the Mexican Revolution and brought more or less continuing pressure on the U.S. government to intervene, diplomatically and even militarily in Mexico. The revolutionary Constitution of 1917 had declared that subsoil resources were the property of the state, and in general provided for extensive government intervention in the economy. It also provided for an extensive agrarian reform of division of the large rural landholdings that developed during and before the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and their distribution among the peasants. Finally, it provided for a long list of benefits for wage and salary workers.

These provisions affected many U.S. individuals and firms that had obtained control of mineral and petroleum resources in Mexico during the Díaz period. They also brought into question the North Americans' right to large haciendas—sometimes of thousands of acres—which they had also acquired under Díaz. Finally, even U.S.-owned enterprises engaged in manufacturing and other non-mining and non-agricultural enterprises would be affected by the provisions of the labor laws deriving from the 1917 Constitution.

There was one other aspect of the Mexican Revolution that aroused widespread hostility in the United States. This was the anticlerical position of the revolutionary regime, which strictly limited the rights of religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, with the Church-State conflict becoming particularly violent during the last half of the 1920s, during the administration of President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928).

CROM, the AFL's partner in the Pan American Federation of Labor, strongly supported the Revolution, and the regimes that were in power during the life of the PAFL—first, that of President Carranza, then those of presidents Obregón and Calles. Luis Morones and other leaders of CROM undoubtedly saw at least one of the principal virtues of the PAFL in its usefulness as an instrument for rallying support for the Mexican regime in the United States—and to a much less important degree, elsewhere in Latin America.

There were various occasions when the alliance of the AFL and CROM in the Pan American Federation was of significant importance in supporting the Mexican regime. One of the first of these incidents occurred in 1919, when a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, headed by Senator Albert Fall of New Mexico, held hearings that pictured a situation in Mexico requiring U.S. military intervention there. PAFL, with the support of the American Federation of Labor, protested these hearings and announced their intention of continuing to support the government of President Carranza.

At about the same time there occurred an incident in which a U.S. consular agent, William O. Jenkins, was arrested in Puebla, Mexico. President Gompers and the Spanish-language secretary Canuto Vargas of PAFL appealed to President Carranza to release Jenkins, which Carranza immediately did.

The next intervention by PAFL in U.S.-Mexican relations took place in mid-1921. At that time, there was an oil workers' strike in the Tampico area and, in response to a plea from the U.S. oil companies whose workers were on strike, U.S. naval vessels were moved to Tampico. Two AFL leaders, who were in Mexico attending a CROM convention, wired Gompers urging that he lodge a protest against this apparent menace of U.S. armed intervention against the walkout. Gompers summoned a meeting of the Executive Committee of PAFL, which agreed to ask Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes to declare that the U.S. ships were not near

Tampico to interfere with the strike. Hughes did so, and shortly thereafter the U.S. vessels were pulled out of the Tampico area. When the CROM convention delegates heard of Hughes' statement, there were shouts of "Viva Gompers!"<sup>42</sup>

A new crisis in U.S.-Mexican relations had begun early in 1920. President Venustiano Carranza was overthrown by a revolt led by army commander General Alvaro Obregón, when it became clear that Carranza was going to choose a hand-picked successor. Carranza was killed in the fighting and Adolfo de la Huerta was installed as provisional president. In December 1920 General Obregón was chosen as president in a general election.

The United States withheld diplomatic recognition from both the de la Huerta and Obregón governments. Particularly after the inauguration of the conservative Republican government of President Gamaliel Harding in March 1921, the U.S. government was under very strong pressure from U.S. mining and petroleum firms, who insisted that recognition should be withheld unless and until the Mexican government repudiated the provisions of the 1917 constitution proclaiming subsoil resources to belong to the State.

Both the American Federation of Labor and PAFL strongly urged recognition of the Obregón regime. When a joint U.S.-Mexican commission was established to discuss the recognition problem, the AFL urged Secretary of State Hughes to name a labor member of the U.S. negotiating team, which he refused to do. However, PAFL named an AFL official as an adviser to that commission and he exercised what influence he could to foster recognition.

Finally, in August 1923 the United States renewed diplomatic relations with Mexico. It is not clear how much influence the AFL and PAFL had in this decision, but undoubtedly they contributed one of the principal forces advocating recognition.<sup>43</sup>

As the end of the Obregón administration approached, the Partido Laborista Mexicano (PLM) which, like CROM, was headed by Luis Morones, strongly endorsed Plutarco Elías Calles, minister of government in the Obregón administration, to be Obregón's successor. Samuel Gompers, in his capacity as president of PAFL, enthusiastically supported PLM's endorsement of Calles.<sup>44</sup>

Late in 1923 a revolt broke out against the Calles candidacy. It was led by ex-provisional President Adolfo de la Huerta, and had the support of a number of the revolutionary generals and even a scattering of trade union leaders. However, Morones quickly named Roberto Haberman, an American who was an important member of the leadership of CROM, to go to Washington to help organize U.S. labor resistance to the de la Huerta revolt.

Samuel Gompers, as both AFL and PAFL president, urged the U.S. government to do all it could to prevent smuggling of arms to the rebels. He also urged U.S. transport unions to be vigilant in keeping track of



suspected arms shipments to the de la Huerta forces. He likewise communicated with the International Federation of Trade Unions (in spite of the fact that his relations with the IFTU were not particularly friendly) and urged its national affiliates to do all they could to prevent shipment of arms to the Mexican rebels from Europe.<sup>45</sup>

Lewis Lorwin recorded that "American trade unionists, especially the International Association of Machinists and the Seamen's Union, became active in blocking the activities of de la Huerta agents in the border cities and in preventing shipments of arms to them. American organized labor thus played an important part in the crushing of the revolt and in the victory of the Obregón government."<sup>46</sup>

Sometimes CROM was able to lend help to its ally in PAFL, the American Federation of Labor. One such case was a 1922 strike of AFL railway shopmen. CROM called upon all Mexican workers to refuse to serve as strikebreakers—as some had done on similar occasions; they also organized demonstrations and marches in Mexico in support of the strike, and raised some money for the strike fund. Snow noted the "the existence of the PAFL made it impossible for the railroads... to hire Mexican 'scabs' to replace the American strikers."<sup>47</sup>

One issue was always present as a possible impediment to the unity of thought and action between the AFL and CROM. This was the problem of migration of Mexican workers to the United States. The AFL had strongly supported the limitation of immigration from Europe encompassed in laws establishing the quota system in the early 1920s (in spite of the fact that Gompers himself was an immigrant from Great Britain). But these laws did not apply to Mexico, and in 1925 AFL officials in the Southwestern states complained that Mexican immigrants were hampering the unions' attempts to organize in that part of the country. William Green, as head of PAFL, succeeded in arranging an immigration conference between the AFL and CROM in August of that year. It agreed that the governments of both Mexico and the United States should cooperate in taking steps to limit the influx of Mexican workers. It also agreed that both union groups would do their utmost to get Mexican immigrant workers to join the appropriate AFL unions.<sup>48</sup>

Another issue that threatened to disrupt relations between the AFL and CROM was the anticlerical policies of the Mexican regime that provoked an outbreak in 1926 of a Catholic Church-supported insurrection against the government of President Calles. This aroused considerable hostility against the Calles regime within the American Federation of Labor, of which a substantial part of the membership and leadership was Catholic. As a consequence, William Green, by then president of both the AFL and PAFL, "found it necessary to declare that the conflict had no relation to the labor movement, and as the connection of the AFL with the CROM through the PAFL was a purely economic one, the subject was not to be furthered discussed by the AFL." His position was supported by Matthew

Woll, a major figure in the AFL leadership as well as treasurer by that time of PAFL, who was himself a Roman Catholic.<sup>49</sup>

## PAFL AND OTHER LATIN AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENTS

The only Latin American countries other than Mexico in which significant union groups played any noticeable role in the Pan American Federation of Labor were those of Central America and the Greater Antilles in the Caribbean. In those South American countries in which labor movements of some significance existed they generally had a political orientation that made them hostile to PAFL. Their anarchist, Communist, and Socialist leadership was strongly opposed to U.S. imperialism in Latin America, and regarded PAFL largely as a tool of the U.S. government and big business.

Although the credentials committees of the various congresses of PAFL reported the presence of delegates from organizations in various South American nations, these organizations were more apparent than real. In some cases they were ephemeral groups without substantial membership or long duration, or, as in the case we have noted of the Venezuelan delegate to the Fifth Congress, they represented groups of workers from a particular South American country who had immigrated to the United States.

Insofar as the Central American and Caribbean countries in which the PAFL had at least nominal member organizations were concerned, the process of industrialization had barely begun, so something approaching a modern proletariat only existed on the railroads, ports, modern agricultural plantations, and a handful of factories. However, only in Puerto Rico were the plantation workers yet unionized, and in Cuba the railroad and port workers' unions were the most important unions. Elsewhere in the region, and to a considerable degree in Cuba and Puerto Rico, the nascent labor movement consisted largely of handicraft workers in small enterprises. To a considerable degree in the Central American countries these organizations were still mutual benefit societies rather than trade unions.

Nicaragua was one of the Central American countries in which the Pan American Federation of Labor took an interest. That country had for long been subject to intervention by the United States, and had become a major example of exercise of the big stick in Latin America.

The Federación Obrera Nicaraguense (FON), which claimed to have some 2,000 members, sent a delegate to the Second Congress of PAFL, who requested that the Pan American Federation urge the U.S. government to assure the holding of honest 1920 elections in his home country, which was then ruled by President Emiliano Chamorro, a reactionary Conservative. Samuel Gompers, as president of PAFL, refused this suggestion, saying that he saw no likelihood of U.S. official intervention. After the election of



Chamorro's son, Diego Manuel, in a patently rigged election, Gompers, in reply to a request of the FON that PAFL urge the United States not to recognize the new president, wrote to the secretary of state, but merely to ask the department's view on the validity of the election.

Although no Nicaraguan delegation was present at the Third Congress of the PAFL, a resolution was introduced there protesting "against the United States protectorate over Nicaragua." Apparently no action was taken on this resolution.

However, in October 1923, President Diego Manuel Chamorro died, and his vice president and successor, Bartolomé Martínez, took office, and promised to carry out extensive reforms to liberalize the regime. In May 1924, the Nicaraguan trade unionist-cum-politician Salmon de la Selva arrived in Washington with credentials from CROM, and soon met with Samuel Gompers and other PAFL officials, to request that PAFL send a mission to Nicaragua to prepare a report for the Pan American Federation on the situation in his country.

The PAFL leadership agreed to send de la Selva and Hartwell Brunson, an official of the AFL's Workers Education Bureau who spoke excellent Spanish, on the mission that de la Selva had requested. They were met with very considerable enthusiasm by workers in several Nicaraguan cities, and had a long meeting with President Martínez, who was very cordial, but said that his efforts at liberalization faced opposition from a Chamorro-controlled Congress. Upon returning to Washington, de la Selva and Brunson reported to the PAFL president, who in turn informed Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes about what he considered a very explosive situation in Nicaragua.

Subsequently, PAFL sent a second mission to Nicaragua, consisting of Salmon de la Selva and the Spanish-language secretary of the PAFL, Candido Vargas, to advise and help the Federación Obrera Nicaraguense in the coming election of a successor to President Martínez. After interviewing the three candidates running in that election, the Federación gave qualified support to Carlos Solórzano and Juan Sacasa, the Liberal Party's candidates for president and vice president, who were victorious.

The situation in the Dominican Republic presented rather different kinds of problems for the Pan American Federation of Labor. The United States had invaded that country in 1916 and established a military occupation regime there. When a Dominican labor group, the Hermandad Comunal Nacionalista (HCN), which claimed some 2,000 members, sought to send a delegate to the Founding Congress of PAFL, it was prevented from doing so by the U.S. military authorities. However, a representative of the HCN, José Eugenio Kunhardt, did attend the Second Congress of the PAFL in Washington, DC. He presented a long list of complaints against the military occupation authorities. The Second PAFL Congress consequently passed a resolution to send a delegation to the Dominican Republic to study labor and general political and economic conditions there.

Peter Brady and Anthony McAndrew, leaders of two AFL unions, were soon after dispatched to make such an investigation. Shortly before they left the United States, Samuel Gompers sent an extensive letter to President Woodrow Wilson enumerating a long list of complaints about the behavior of the U.S. military authorities in the Dominican Republic. This letter was answered by Secretary of State Lansing, without dealing with most of the complaints lodged by Gompers. When they returned from the Dominican Republic, Brady and McAndrew submitted a report suggesting 35 changes that should be made by the military occupation authorities.

At the Third Congress of PAFL in January 1921, Kunhardt presented a resolution calling for the immediate withdrawal of the U.S. military forces occupying the Dominican Republic, which was adopted. Samuel Gompers then sent a telegram to President Wilson containing that resolution—to the great annoyance of the president.

American military occupation of the Dominican Republic finally ended in 1924. Sinclair Snow noted that “just what influence the PAFL had in the case is debatable, but it is highly probable that both President Wilson and Secretary Daniels were strongly influenced by the pressure put on them by the labor group.”<sup>50</sup> Of course, U.S. occupation was ended long after Wilson left office.

Panama presented a special kind of problem for the AFL and PAFL, centering on the Canal Zone. On the one hand, there was rank discrimination against Panamanians in the hiring practices of the U.S. Canal authorities. The Panamanians were on the so-called silver roll and received considerably less pay than U.S. citizens doing the same work, who were on the gold roll. A second problem was the fact that the various AFL craft unions that had organized U.S. citizens employed on the canal refused to accept Panamanians into membership.

No Panamanian Republic union group was represented in PAFL's Fourth Congress in 1924, when the *Federación Obrera de la República de Panamá* sent a delegation. However, Samuel Gompers was aware of Panamanian workers' complaints against the way they were treated by the AFL unions in the Canal Zone, and he suggested that they send a delegation to Washington in March 1921, to confer with leaders of the AFL unions involved. We have no indication that such a meeting took place.

However, problems that the AFL unions in the Canal Zone were having with the canal management brought Gompers to make a visit to Panama in January 1924. His time there was mainly taken up with problems of the AFL union locals in the zone, although he did confer with leaders of the *Federación Obrera*, and opined that Panamanians employed in the Canal Zone ought to receive higher wages than they were getting.

Clearly, in this period no serious effort was made by the AFL or the PAFL either to end the gold roll-silver roll disparities, or to end the discriminatory policies of the AFL unions in the Canal Zone against Panamanian workers.<sup>51</sup> Those problems were to continue for another quarter of a

century or more, and would only be resolved when the American Federation of Labor again became interested in developing strong relations with the Latin American labor movements after World War II.

Finally, there was the case of Cuba, a country in which Samuel Gompers had taken an interest over many years. As early as 1907, he had gone to Cuba to announce his support of a cigar workers' strike.<sup>52</sup> Ten years later, in 1917, Gompers again went to Cuba, to persuade some American railroaders who had come there to serve as strikebreakers in a walkout of Cuban railwaymen to return home, which he succeeded in doing.<sup>53</sup>

Less than a year before his death, Gompers and other leaders of the PAFL conceived the notion of sending a mission to Cuba to help bring about a unification of the labor movement there, and affiliation of the united group to PAFL. They had a long discussion of this idea with General Enoch Crowder, who was then U.S. ambassador to Cuba and who, at least at first, seemed enthusiastic about the proposal. However, no such mission was in fact ever sent to Cuba, and when the Cuban labor movement was to a considerable degree unified, the new confederation was first under anarchist and then under Communist influence.<sup>54</sup>

At least two Cuban union groups, *Hermanidad Ferroviaria* (Railroad Brotherhood) and the *Federación Cubana del Trabajo*, joined the Pan American Federation of Labor.<sup>55</sup> It was apparently these two groups that were represented at the Fifth Congress of PAFL in 1927 where, as we have noted, those managing the congress shelved a resolution introduced by the Cuban delegation that they felt would amount to a white-wash of the clearly antilabor dictatorship of President Gerardo Machado.

## **PAFL AND THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

One question that was pending throughout the effective life of the Pan American Federation of Labor was the possibility of its association with a worldwide labor grouping, specifically, the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). However, such affiliation never occurred, principally because of disagreement between Samuel Gompers and other AFL leaders and IFTU.

The IFTU had been established before World War I, and first was known as the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centers, changing its name to International Federation of Trade Unions only in 1913, on the urging of the leadership of the American Federation of Labor.

Although the membership of IFTU was principally European, the AFL had participated in most of its pre World War I congresses. Also, although IFTU was largely in suspension during the War, the AFL again participated in meetings designed to reconstruct it after the conflict was over. However, Gompers and other AFL leaders were unhappy about several aspects of the revived IFTU, including its close association with the revived Socialist

International, its alleged centralization, and its high dues scale for its national affiliates. At the end of considerable negotiating, the American Federation of Labor did not renew its membership in IFTU, which more or less *a priori* meant that the Pan American Federation of Labor would not become part of IFTU either.<sup>56</sup>

Luis Morones and other CROM leaders were disposed to be more friendly toward IFTU and suggested to Samuel Gompers that two CROM leaders, Ricardo Treviño and Alfonso Caso, who were then in Europe, be designated PAFL fraternal delegates to an IFTU congress about to take place, but apparently Gompers rejected the idea. However, the Spanish-language secretary of PAFL sent greetings from PAFL to the IFTU meeting, and in 1923 Luis Morones himself attended IFTU's annual congress, although not officially representing PAFL.<sup>57</sup>

It was perhaps Morones' interest in IFTU that pushed Gompers to propose what came to be known as the "Labor Monroe Doctrine." At a meeting between AFL and CROM leaders in El Paso in the autumn of 1923, the CROM leaders agreed that their organization would not affiliate with IFTU or any other international labor group without first consulting the American Federation of Labor. Lewis Lorwin noted, "Under Gompers' inspiration, the American and Mexican delegations jointly announced what they termed a 'Monroe Doctrine of Labor,' that they would oppose efforts on the part of European labor to encroach upon the 'sovereignty' of labor in the Western Hemisphere."<sup>58</sup>

In 1926, more than a year after Gompers' death, the Confederación Regional Obrero Mexicana issued an invitation to union groups throughout America to a conference in Mexico, with the apparent purpose of forming a regional affiliate of IFTU. According to Francisco Pérez Leirós, the Argentine unionist whose Socialist-controlled Confederación Obrera Argentina sent him as a delegate to that meeting, "representatives of a majority of the countries of Latin America" attended that meeting. Pérez Leirós said, "Although the workers of Mexico adhered to the COPA [PAFL] they also considered the convenience of founding a single movement of continental scope and with membership in the International Federation of Trade Unions, which had also sent its most typical representatives to this conference." However, Pérez Leirós noted that the decisions of the 1926 conference to establish such an organization "did not materialize for various [reasons]."<sup>59</sup>

In 1929, Matthew Woll again raised the question of the relationship between the Pan American Federation of Labor and IFTU. He published an article that "suggested that the I.F.T.U. and the Pan-American Federation of Labour should establish a mutual relationship. He claimed that the jurisdiction of the Pan-American Federation extended over the whole of the Western Hemisphere and that of the I.F.T.U. was for all practical purposes an Eastern Hemispheric labour movement. His idea was that each should recognise the supremacy of the other in its own field. On this basis of

equality they could between them constitute a World Federation of Trade Unions. The idea was endorsed by the 1929 Convention of the A.F. of L., but nothing came of it."<sup>60</sup>

### ATROPHY OF THE PAN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

The Fifth Congress of the Pan American Federation of Labor was its last. Although a Sixth Congress was originally scheduled to be held in Havana, Cuba, in January 1930, it was announced in October 1929 that this would be postponed. Although the Executive Committee of PAFL subsequently sounded out the member organizations about a meeting in January 1931, that did not come to pass, and in August 1931 it was clear that there would be no Sixth Congress "in the near future." In subsequent years there were fitful references to PAFL in American Federation of Labor annual congresses, but no new Sixth Congress of PAFL was organized.<sup>61</sup>

One reason for this was the AFL's handling of the problem of Mexican immigration into the United States. Mexican immigrants had been exempted from the 1924 Immigration Act limiting the number of foreigners who could enter and become permanent residents of the United States. The AFL and CROM made a deal, pledging the AFL to continue to support the exemption of Mexicans from immigration restrictions and CROM agreeing to discourage Mexicans from coming into the United States, and this accord had been ratified by the 1927 convention of the AFL.

However, this agreement was repudiated by the 1928 AFL convention. That same meeting refused to condemn U.S. government interventionism in various Latin American countries. As a result of this change of position by the AFL, as Lewis Lorwin commented, "[t]he A.F.L. lost much of the good will which Gompers had built up in Latin America."<sup>62</sup>

However, after the founding of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) in September 1938, the American Federation of Labor became interested in reviving PAFL. At a meeting of the Executive Council of the AFL in Miami in February 1939, it was decided to call a meeting of the Executive of PAFL in Washington, DC, in May, when both the Executives of the AFL and the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), which the AFL had recently joined, would also be having sessions in Washington. The hope was expressed that such a meeting of the Pan American Federation of Labor's Executive would call a new congress of the organization.

Matthew Woll, both vice president of the AFL and last treasurer of the Pan American Federation, took the lead in proposing this new congress of PAFL. He also said that he thought that the AFL should continue to have the CROM of Luis Morones (CROM had split in the intervening years) as its principal partner in the PAFL. He said, "My point of view is that the

C.R.O.M. is founded on sound lines more akin in principles and practice to the A.F. of L. than any other Mexican labor organization." He also praised the "apolitical" nature of the CROM. Woll concluded that the AFL should "continue to recognize the C.R.O.M. as represented by Morones and [Eucario] Leen."<sup>63</sup>

When the AFL Executive met again in May 1939, both Luis Morones and Santiago Iglesias were present. It was decided at that meeting to send Iglesias on a trip around Latin America "to survey . . . conditions in the various Latin American countries," as well as to issue a call for a new Congress of PAFL.

Iglesias started on his tour of inspection, but suddenly died in Mexico City. However, the AFL leadership did not give up the idea of reestablishing PAFL. At its December 1940 annual convention, the AFL passed "a resolution directing its officers to take the initiative in 'revitalizing' the Pan American Federation of Labor, and in convoking a hemispheric labor conference for 1942, as a means of combating totalitarian inroads."<sup>64</sup>

However, the entry of the United States and many of the Latin American countries into World War II made the proposed 1942 revival congress of the PAFL impractical. That was the end of the idea of reestablishing the Pan American Federation of Labor. When the AFL again became interested in forming a hemispheric labor group after World War II, it immediately decided that reviving PAFL was the wrong way to start.

## CONCLUSION

The Pan American Federation of Labor had an effective life of about one decade. Although it was the first effort to bring together a hemispheric union of the labor movements of the Western Hemisphere, it largely failed in this endeavor. One must ask why this was the case.

One reason for this failure was undoubtedly summed up in the title of an article about PAFL that Santiago Iglesias wrote in the AFL's magazine *American Federationist* in 1925: "The Child of the A.F. of L." As Iglesias wrote in the article, "The Pan American Federation of Labor is peculiarly the child of the American Federation of Labor."<sup>65</sup>

The era in which PAFL originated and functioned more or less effectively was not one in which a 'child of the A.F. of L.' could have much attraction for most of the more important labor movements of Latin America. It was a period in which the so-called Roosevelt Corollary of the Monroe Doctrine—the assertion of the right of the United States to intervene militarily and in other ways in individual Latin American countries to prevent them from doing things that might provoke intervention of other powers outside of the Western Hemisphere—was most clearly in effect. At the time PAFL was founded, the U.S. Marine Corps was governing both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and during the life of PAFL, the United



States would militarily occupy Nicaragua and engage in war there with the guerilla troops of Augusto Sandino, while U.S. ambassadors were virtually dictating policy to Cuban presidents.

These actions made almost any U.S. institution suspect in the eyes of the leaders and members of the most important labor movements of Latin America, particularly South America. Those highly politicized groups were almost entirely influenced by elements of the political Left—anarchists, Socialists, Communists, and others—which almost by definition were opposed to Yankee imperialism. They tended to suspect the American Federation of Labor of being an aspect of that imperialism.

The American Socialist journalist James O'Neal, writing about the Fourth Congress of PAFL, commented:

The larger South American organizations did not send delegates and have not been represented in any of the conferences. They are interested in the organization of a Pan-American alliance that will include both political and economic organizations of workers. They also considered the leadership of the late Mr. Gompers as too conservative to guarantee an effective union. In 1921 the Argentine Labor Federation and similar organizations in Brazil and Uruguay, declined to send delegates to the Pan American Federation of Labor. The Argentine organization, in answer to an invitation replied: 'We shall take part in no organization that has anything to do with Samuel Gompers.'<sup>66</sup>

Of course, the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana was the great exception. But the explanation of that case was that, on the one hand, the Mexican confederation (and the successive Mexican revolutionary governments that largely financed CROM) were exceedingly anxious to find friends in the United States who would help prevent military intervention by the United States against the Mexican Revolution. They found such a friend in Samuel Gompers (and some other AFL leaders) who had long been interested personally in the fate of the Mexican workers during the last decade of the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship and the turbulent decade following its overthrow. Gompers found an excellent partner in the person of Luis Morones who, whatever his early anarchosindicalist background, was able to collaborate fully in the founding and maintenance of the Pan American Federation of Labor.

With the exception of CROM, the Latin American affiliates of PAFL were very weak organizations. Organized labor had barely begun to appear on any appreciable scale in the Central American countries, and some of the PAFL groups there were in fact of short duration. The Argentine unionist Francisco Pérez Leirós wrote that in 1939 he had traveled through Central America "and I can affirm that in some of these countries I looked for the headquarters of these organisms without encountering them."<sup>67</sup> In the case of Cuba, which did have a substantial labor movement by the 1920s, only one significant industrial union, the railroad workers, and one central labor group of secondary importance, joined PAFL.

Another factor that undermined PAFL was the fact that it depended too much on two men, Samuel Gompers and Luis Morones. Gompers died right after the Fourth Congress of the federation in 1924, and although his successor, William Green, was willing to continue working in PAFL for some time, he did not have the personal interest or the willingness to use AFL funds to maintain the Pan American group that Gompers had had.

As for Luis Morones, although he maintained his interest in the Pan American Federation of Labor, CROM, his trade union base, largely fell apart after they quarreled with President Plutarco Elías Calles in 1928, and thus no longer had the support of the Mexican government. Undoubtedly he no longer had the funds that CROM had formerly spent on PAFL. When, after World War II a new effort would be made to establish an Inter American labor grouping, Morones was destined to have nothing but nuisance value as far as that new organization was concerned.

Gerald Michael Greenfield and Sheldon L. Maram sketched the fading out of the Pan American Federation of Labor: "Throughout the 1930s, the Pan American Federation of Labor was reduced to a shadow organization. It held an abortive conference in New Orleans in 1940, and then faded away."<sup>68</sup>

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## CHAPTER 3

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# The Communists and CSLA

The Communists began to emerge in the 1920s as a significant political influence in the labor movements of Latin American countries. The Communist International (CI or Comintern) had been established early in 1919, in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The Comintern was conceived of as worldwide party, with sections in various countries.

The model of the Comintern was the new kind of party that the Bolsheviks had established in Russia under the leadership of V. I. Lenin. Whereas the Russian party conceived of itself as the vanguard of the Russian working class, the Comintern was to be the vanguard of the worldwide proletariat. It was also, like its Russian mother party, to be highly centralized, tightly disciplined, and thoroughly indoctrinated. These qualities of the Comintern, it was claimed, gave it the natural right to take the leadership of the global proletariat.

At its inception, the Comintern had virtually no affiliates in Latin America. However, the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution had been strongly felt in the anarchist groups, socialist parties, and in the labor movements associated with them, in the countries of the area. By the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922, it could boast of having affiliates in several Latin American nations. The Socialist parties of Chile and Uruguay had converted themselves into Communist parties and joined the Comintern. A dissident Socialist Party in Argentina had also become part of the CI. In Mexico, after something of a comedy of errors among competitive factions proclaiming themselves Communists, by 1922 there existed a party that sent delegates to the Fourth CI Congress. In Brazil, a Communist Party had been formed principally by anarchist intellectuals and trade unionists.

Later in the 1920s other parties with more or less close association with the Communist International were formed in Latin America. In 1925 a Communist Party was founded in Cuba, principally by students and trade unionists, which was accepted into the Comintern and soon began to have some weight in the struggle against the dictatorship of President Gerardo Machado. In Peru and Ecuador, Socialist parties sympathetic to the Communists were established and became fraternal members of the Comintern. In Colombia, a Partido Socialista Revolucionario was founded in 1926 "which would be Communist in orientation but not in name, and which would not affiliate immediately with the Comintern."<sup>1</sup> In 1929, a Communist Party was founded in Costa Rica, which at first had a following principally among university students. Elsewhere in Central America, although there was proselytizing by the Comintern and the Mexican party, no actual parties were formed in this period.

### THE PROFINTERN

The launching of the Communist International had caused some confusion in anarchosyndicalist ranks. The anarchist at first thought of the CI as being similar to the First International of Marx and Bakunin, with which trade unions as well as political groups were affiliated. Thus some of them, notably the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) of Spain, rushed to express their support for their Comintern and to request admission to it.

However, the Bolshevik leaders had a completely different kind of international organization in mind, as we have noted. The Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 issued the famous 21 Demands, setting forth the conditions that a group seeking admission to the CI would have to fulfill. These made it clear that the Communist International and its national sections would be political parties, and that those parties would have to conform to the Russian model, in terms of name, organizational principles and doctrine.

The Comintern also decided that those trade union groups, such as the Spanish CNT, which had sought to become part of the CI would be offered the alternative of becoming affiliated with an international trade union organization under the guidance and control of the CI. This was the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), which was often referred to by its Russian nickname, Profintern, established in 1922.

During the 1920s, the Profintern was faced with two different situations in the countries in which it had adherents. In a handful of cases there existed national trade union centers that were under the control of the Communist Party, and these organizations more or less automatically became affiliates of RILU. In most countries, however, the national trade union movements were controlled by non-Communists, and the function of the Profintern affiliates was to "bore from within" those movements, seeking to bring them under the control of the Communist Party. A prime example

of that kind of RILU affiliate was the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL) of the United States, which sought without any great success to “bore from within” the American Federation of Labor.

In some cases Communist efforts to penetrate and gain control of existing non-Communist trade union groups brought about exclusion from the existing national central labor bodies of unions over which the Communists had succeeded in gaining control. The Communists would then be forced to establish their own central labor union organizations without, however, giving up entirely on efforts to penetrate the non-Communist sectors of the labor movement.

Of course, the policies and strategies of the Profintern were dictated by the Communist International, and through it, by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Therefore, the Red International of Labor Unions and its national affiliates were inevitably affected by the struggles for power (and policy) that took place within the CPSU during most of the 1920s.

In 1928–1929 Joseph Stalin, secretary-general of the Soviet Communist Party, won out in these struggles. Upon getting control of the CPSU, and therefore of the Comintern and its subsidiary bodies such as the Profintern, Stalin launched what came to be known as the Third Period in the history of International Communism.

The Communist Third Period doctrine, which had first been put forth in a somewhat ambiguous form at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in August-September 1928 and within a few months was elaborated in an extreme form, began with the assertion that the world had entered a period of breakdown of the capitalist system and general spread of the Marxist-Leninist social revolution.

In the face of this ultimately revolutionary struggle, world political forces, according to the (Stalinized) Comintern, divided into three camps. The only true leaders of this revolutionary wave were the Communist (Stalinist) parties. According to this analysis and doctrine, all right wing opponents of the Revolution were fascists, since fascism was only an expression of capitalism in dire crisis. Finally, all elements of the Left apart from the Stalinist Communists—that is, Social Democrats, anarchists, dissident Communists (Trotskyists and others), middle-class liberals—were social fascists. The social fascists were under these circumstances the worst enemies of the working class, since they not only opposed the Revolution, but tried to mislead the workers into opposing it as well.

There was a corollary to this analysis that involved the trade union movement. This was that during the Third Period Revolution the Communists must have their own labor organizations, since those controlled by the social fascists (of whatever variety) would mislead the workers into opposing the Revolution. Generally, therefore, the Communists should withdraw whatever trade unions they controlled from the non-Communist central labor organization, and bring them together in new

central labor groups under strict party control. These should all join the Profintern.

### MOVES TO FORM CSLA

The Comintern's Third Period formed the background against which the first Communist-controlled Latin America-wide labor confederation, the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana (CSLA), was formed and maintained. With the end of the Third Period, CSLA quietly disappeared.

What turned out to be the first step toward the establishment of CSLA was a gathering in Moscow of Latin American trade unionists who were Communists or Communist sympathizers, to participate in the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, in November 1927. According to the *American Communist*, Harrison George, this more or less accidental grouping of Latin American trade unionists constituted "a larger number of representatives from the Latin American trade unions than had got together in one time and place in Latin America itself."<sup>2</sup>

This group of Latin American trade union leaders held a meeting at which they adopted a resolution that began:

We delegates of working-class unions of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Uruguay, Chile and Ecuador, who are in Moscow on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, have met in the headquarters of the Red International of Trade Unions on December 11, 1927, and after having examined the problems of the working class and the unions in the countries of Latin America, have come to the following conclusion... To proceed in all of the Latin America countries to the preparation of unity of all trade union organizations in the fight against the offensive of the national bourgeoisie, and for the establishment of close fraternal relations among the working class organizations, for the constitution of a single working-class international to include the unions of all countries, all races and all continents, to fight in common against imperialist wars and for the integral emancipation of labor from the power of capital.<sup>3</sup>

Only three national central labor groups were represented by people who signed the resolution. Two of these were the Federación Obrera de Chile, which was completely under Communist control, but was at the time being hard pressed by the dictatorship of President Carlos Ibáñez; and the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba, in the leadership of which the Communists still were in the minority, although two years later they would gain complete control. The third such national grouping was the Unión Sindical Argentina, which was a predominantly syndicalist organization of which the Communists were trying to gain control, and which would not become a member of the Latin American confederation of Communist-controlled union that was finally established in 1929. The rest of the participants in the 1927 meeting represented local or individual craft or industrial unions under Communist control.<sup>4</sup>

Harrison George noted the further steps that were taken at the Moscow 1927 meeting to put into effect the resolution that was adopted there. He wrote:

It was agreed that propaganda for Latin American Trade Union Unity should be begun at once by delegates returning home and that another conference to work out organizational steps to be taken by a still wider representative delegation of workers invited to attend the Fourth World Congress of the R.I.L.U.... Following that Congress, in April 1928 such a conference was held[;] extensive discussion resulted in resolutions laying down the line of policy, one of the chief items being the relations between the trade unions and the peasantry, a call issued for a congress of all Latin American trade unions to be held at Montevideo, Uruguay, May 15, 1929, a Provisional Committee set up, its work outlined an agenda for the congress decided upon.<sup>5</sup>

Those organizations represented at this preparatory conference differed considerably from the leaders who had signed the Moscow document. Most notably missing was the Unión Sindical Argentina, which the Communists had not succeeded in capturing. The only Argentine organizations represented at the April 1928 meeting were the Unión Obrera Provincial of Córdoba, Red Trade Union Groups (Grupos Rojos Sindicales) of Buenos Aires and Rosario, and Autonomous Unions (Sindicatos Autónomos) of Buenos Aires.<sup>6</sup>

A Committee for the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana established its headquarters in Montevideo. It began to publish a biweekly review, *El Trabajador Latino Americano*, which claimed that it "publishes ample information on the continental and world labor movement."<sup>7</sup> It also put out several pamphlets concerning the need for "unity" in the Latin American labor movement and made preparations for the May 1929 conference to establish a region-wide confederation under Communist auspices and control. On the inside cover of one of these pamphlets was the proposed agenda for that conference, and it was added that "[t]here have been invited all the national and regional centrals and unions in general," and "[t]he conditions for representation at the Congress will be provided in good time."<sup>8</sup>

This pamphlet, entitled *The Latin American Trade Union Movement, Its Virtues and Its Defects*, consisted principally of a speech that A. Losovsky, secretary-general of the Profintern, had given to the 1928 meeting of Latin American labor leaders in Moscow. The introduction to the pamphlet explained that Losovsky had been asked to address the meeting to give "a general report, an idea of the Latin American labor movement in general, around which would center the debates and their corresponding resolutions." Losovsky was qualified for this, it was claimed, because "[t]he Red International of Labor Unions, as a real international and revolutionary organization, has always followed closely our struggles, and even intervened in them, as it has in all colonial and semi-colonial countries."<sup>9</sup>



The introduction, concerning Losovsky's sketch of Latin America's labor movement, noted:

As we had hoped, he gave us an admirable synthesis of virtues and defects.... He spoke of the noxious isolation of it from the international labor movement; of its provincialism; of its tactics and its primitive methods of struggles; of its inability to link the daily economic struggles with its final objectives (the Proletarian Revolution); of the problem of the intellectuals in the midst of the trade union organization; of the fundamental importance that the peasant problem has for the industrial proletariat, etcetera.... Not all was criticism that pointed out defects and errors. Our working classes and their organizations have many positive aspects, they are endowed with a great spirit of combativity, and great revolutionary enthusiasm. To these things Comrade Losovsky referred, indicating their great importance.<sup>10</sup>

The Provisional Secretariat, established in April 1928, indicated the grand objectives of the proposed new organization. It said, "Events push our working class to establish conditions of struggle successfully to improve its miserable and painful economic and political situation in conformity with its historic mission, and the only way to do so is by uniting and concentrating, across frontiers, all the Latin American workers in a potent continental organization."<sup>11</sup>

However, it also set forth the ideological context within which the new hemispheric labor organization would function. It said: "[Y]ou know, comrades, that we are living in the sharpest and most decisive period of the historic world struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. On the one hand the period of the Proletarian Revolution has begun, our class having one sixth of the world in its hands—the Republic of the Workers and Peasants of Russia—and on the other hand, we see the most brutal development of Capitalist Imperialism."<sup>12</sup>

Much of the work of organizing the founding congress of the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana, and recruiting delegates to it, was carried out by a young Venezuelan, Ricardo Martínez. He had migrated to New York City in 1923, where he soon joined the Communist Party of the United States, and became involved in its relations with the Latin American Communist parties. He also organized in New York City the Unión de Trabajadores de Venezuela, made up of artisans and other workers among the Venezuelan immigrants in New York.

At the urging of CPUSA, Martínez sought to participate in the 1927 Congress of the Pan American Federation of Labor in Washington, DC. He finally succeeded in getting seated as the representative of the Venezuelan workers in that meeting. There he received considerable publicity for his effort to get PAFL to go on record against U.S. military operations in Nicaragua against the guerilla army of Augusto César Sandino.

This publicity won Martínez an invitation to attend the Fourth Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions in Moscow in April 1928. There

he was elected the Latin American member of the Executive Committee of the Profintern. This selection—unconnected as he was to any real Latin American labor organization—undoubtedly reflected the scanty labor organization membership of the Latin American Communists, and the lack of extensive knowledge of Latin American organized labor on the part of the Soviet Communists.

In any case, Martínez spent the next two years traveling widely throughout Latin America, establishing contacts with local Communist parties and labor movements, seeking to mobilize delegates to attend the founding conference of CSLA. During that period, and for some years thereafter, he was a member of the Caribbean Bureau of the Comintern, representing labor, as well as remaining a member of the Executive Council of RILU for eight years. He was also on the Latin American Buro of the Profintern and editor of its periodical *El Trabajador Latino Americano*.<sup>13</sup>

The Comité Pro CSLA did a good deal of preparatory work for the founding congress of the confederación. For instance, it drew up a project of the statutes of the organization. It also sent out an open letter to the organizations that were planning to participate, including a questionnaire concerning economic conditions in their respective countries, the strike situations there, the nature of their national labor movements, including their ideological orientation.<sup>14</sup> The Committee also prepared draft resolutions on "The Situation of Working Youth and the Tasks of the Trade Union Movement," "Problems of Organization," and "On the Problems of Immigration and Emigration."<sup>15</sup>

## THE FOUNDING OF CSLA

The founding congress of the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana met in Montevideo in May 1929, and lasted for 14 days. There were reported to be 53 delegates from labor organizations in 15 countries. The largest delegation, from Argentina, consisted of 14 delegates from organizations of workers in various cities and in particular trades or industries.

Organizations of some substance that were represented in the Montevideo congress included the Central Nacional Obrera y Campesina of Colombia, the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba, control over which the Communists had just recently won, and the Comité Pro-Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú. Reflecting the application in Latin America of the Comintern's Third Period program of splitting non-Communist union groups to form completely party-controlled ones was the presence of delegates from the newly formed Confederación Sindical Unitaria of Mexico, and the Confederação Geral do Trabalho Brasileiro of Brazil.

One significant group, the Unión Sindical Argentina (USA), which had signed the original December 1927 call for Latin American trade union unity, was not represented at the founding meeting of CSLA. This was

because USA, a predominantly syndicalist organization that the Communists had penetrated and sought unsuccessfully to gain control of, was by 1929 strongly opposed to the Communists, both domestically and internationally.

One Communist-controlled national labor group, the *Federación Obrera de Chile*, seems not to have been represented at the Montevideo congress. By 1929 it was being extensively persecuted by the Carlos Ibáñez dictatorship, but that does not fully explain its failure to participate.

Different delegations had been given different voting rights by the congress planners, presumably reflecting their size and relative importance. Those from Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina had five votes each; Cuba, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, and Paraguay had four votes, the Bolivians and Ecuadorians were given three votes, while the Venezuelans, Panamanians, Guatemalans, and those from El Salvador had two. The Costa Rican delegates had the right to speak, but not to vote.

The Montevideo Congress had a nine point agenda:

1. Report of the Provisional Secretariat on its work. 2. The fight against British and American imperialism and native reaction. 3. The attitude toward the Pan American Federation of Labor. 4. Program of economic demands. 5. National and international trade union unity. 6. Problems of immigration and emigration. 7. Problems of the Indians and the organization of the agricultural proletariat. 8. Creation of the *Confederación Sindical Latino Americana*. 9. Election of officials of the *Confederación*.<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere I have summarized the proceedings and decisions of the Montevideo meeting. I wrote: "The subjects discussed included agricultural problems, trade union organizational matters, immigration, youth Indian and Negro problems. Long discussions centered on the supposed dangers of war and on the fight against imperialism, and the congress was reported to have 'declared war upon British, and especially American imperialism'."

I continued:

The Congress devoted a great deal of attention to the problems of the Communist labor movements in particular countries. The meeting was said to have 'considered plans for building a class-conscious labor movement in relatively rising fields.' It laid plans for mass demonstrations, particularly a continent-wide series of meetings against unemployment, to be held on March 30, 1930. A pact of solidarity was signed between the new C.S.L.A. and the Trade Union Education League, the trade union propaganda agency of the United States Communist Party, which a few months later was converted into a rival of the American Federation of Labor under the name of the Trade Union Unity League.<sup>17</sup>

The Solidarity Pact provided for TUEL to support strike situations of the member union groups of CSLA, and CSLA to do the same for the

strikes of the TUEL affiliates. A supplementary accord provided that each would send fraternal delegates to meetings of the other, would jointly struggle against imperialistic firms, and would jointly publish pamphlets and other documents of common interest. TUEL promised to pay special attention to organizing Latin American workers resident in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

The CSLA founding congress paid considerable attention to denouncing its rivals or possible rivals in the ranks of Latin American organized labor. It passed a three-page resolution on "The CSLA in the face of the various tendencies and types of trade union organization of the Latin America Workers." It concentrated particularly on denouncing the Pan American Federation of Labor.<sup>19</sup> Another resolution on "The Struggle Against Imperialism and the C.O.P.A." was devoted almost entirely to PAFL (COPA). It was defined as "the carrier of the Monroe Doctrine among the ranks of the American working class," and said that PAFL's function was "domesticating the trade union movement of Latin America, imbuing it with the spirit of Gompersism and thus submitting it ideologically and particularly to the interests of Yankee imperialism."

That same resolution also took note of the efforts of the International Federation of Trade Unions, the so-called Amsterdam International, to recruit affiliates in Latin America. It was accused of "reflecting the interests of English Imperialism."<sup>20</sup>

## A SHORT HISTORY OF CSLA

CSLA was a creation of the Comintern Third Period. It lasted as long as that phase in the history of the Comintern persisted, and disappeared when the CI abandoned that strategy.

Within two years of its establishment, CSLA claimed to have "the revolutionary trade union movement of 16 countries" in its ranks. It was asserted that "[t]he CSLA has been transformed into a center of attraction for all the elements of the class who encounter themselves in the anarchist and reformist camps, which has already found partial expression in the abandonment of the PAFL by a series of trade union organizations (Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, and most recently Nicaragua), and their affiliation with the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana."

Among its other activities, CSLA organized simultaneous demonstrations in countries in which it had affiliates. For instance, it organized a series of demonstrations against unemployment, and one on the plight of women workers. These activities were part of wider campaigns carried out by the Red International of Labor Unions. One of the most important of these activities was CSLA's support for the Continental Anti-War Congress held in Uruguay in January 1933, which was organized by CSLA and "the antiwar committees of Argentina and Uruguay." The January-February 1933 issue of CSLA's periodical *El Trabajador Latino Americano*

was devoted largely to that conference. Its front page consisted of a long "Welcome to the delegates to the Continental Anti-War Congress."

These greetings demanded "a cessation of hostilities in the Bolivian-Paraguayan and Peruvian-Colombian Wars!" The first of these was the so-called Chaco War, the other the Leticia incident border dispute between Colombia and Peru. The greetings also called for "Fraternization of all soldiers and people of Latin America!" and "active antiwar among the soldiers and sailors of all the armies!"

The greetings also included a demand common to all Communist and pro-Communist organizations then and for the next half century: "the uncompromising defense of the Soviet Union, the great republic of Socialist labor menaced with an armed intervention on the part of the world-wide imperialistic bandits! For an active support to the peace policy of the Republic of the Soviets!"

### CSLA PRO-SOVIET CAMPAIGNS

Pro-Soviet propaganda was clearly one of the major functions of the Confederación Latino Americana. Thus, half of the September-October 1929 issue of *El Trabajador Latino Americano* was devoted to the USSR, with a lead article on "the XII Anniversary of the Revolution of October." The November 1930 issue of the same periodical had an article on "The Anti-soviet Counterrevolution in the Dock of the Accused," lauding the work of the GPU (State Political Directorate) and a trial of Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks that was then in process in Moscow. Similarly, the May-June 1931 issue of the periodical had a series of articles on the question of forced labor, including one by Karl Radek on Soviet treatment of *kulaks*, asserting that "[w]e cannot concede the freedom to circulate or allow them to enter our firms and kolkhozes to sabotage work from the inside," adding that "[w]e put them in sectors far removed from our front, where they must work hard to earn their living."

In November 1932, *El Trabajador Latino Americano* devoted the first 19 pages to praise the USSR. It included articles on "Some Lessons of the October Revolution for the Latin American Proletariat," "The Congress of Trade Unions in the Country of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," and "Moscow, the Red Capital, is Transformed Into the World Capital."

### CSLA AND THE PROFINTERN AND COMINTERN

The Confederación Sindical Latino Americana was an integral part of the Red International of Labor Unions. It was also subject to the control of the Communist International, as was the Profintern itself.

The participation of CSLA in Profintern activities was indicated by the increase in the number of Latin American delegates to the Fifth Congress of RILU that was held in Moscow in the summer of 1930, in contrast to

those from Latin America who had attended the Fourth Congress, held before the foundation of CSLA.

According to the May 1930 issue of *El Trabajador Latino Americano*, it was predicted that some 60 delegates from the Latin American countries would attend the Fifth Congress. The periodical indicated how the number of delegates from various Latin American countries and areas would increase in that RILU meeting over the number who had participated in the preceding Profintern congress.

In Argentina, the Comité de Unidad Clasista held a national conference to choose the five delegates who were to go the Moscow meeting. These were to include workers from both Buenos Aires and the interior of the country.

In the case of Uruguay, the number of delegates to the Fifth Congress would be six, in contrast to only two who had been present at the previous congress. These would include the secretary-general of the Confederación General de Trabajadores del Uruguay, and members of the construction, maritime, packinghouse and shoeworkers, and one from the working youth.

The Fifth Profintern Congress was the first one in which a Paraguayan delegation would be present. Three or four delegates were to be chosen at a national trade union conference in which the CSLA affiliate, the Unión Obrera, and various independent unions would participate. It was probable that the delegates would include one from the Liga Obrera Marítima, the packinghouse workers, and the construction or shoeworkers.

Whereas only three delegates from Brazil had been present at the Fourth Profintern Congress, it was planned to send five to the Fifth Congress. Bolivia would be represented for the first time, and meetings had been held in La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, and Sucre to choose those who would go to Moscow. It was foreseen that three would be named, including one tin miner.

The CSLA affiliate in Peru, the Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú (CGTP) was planning to send three or four delegates, one directly representing the CGTP, others representing unions of miners, agricultural workers, and maritime workers.

In the case of Ecuador, there had been two delegates to the Fourth RILU Congress, but it was planned to send three or four delegates to the following one. Conferences had been held in Quito and Guayaquil to select those who would go to Moscow.

Chilean unions had sent one delegate to the Fourth Congress, but three were going to attend the 1930 one, "in spite of persecution" to which the Chilean labor movement was being subjected by the dictatorship of Carlos Ibáñez.

Five delegates from Colombia were going to Moscow to represent the Central Obrera y Campesina de Colombia. There was in progress a debate to decide what line these delegates should adopt.

Whereas only Mexico in the Central American-Caribbean region had been represented at the Fourth RILU Congress, delegates to the Fifth were to include people from Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Mexico was going to have from five to seven delegates for the first time at the Fifth RILU congress. Of course, Cuba would be represented.

CSLA itself drew up a resolution to be submitted to the 1930 Congress of the Profintern. It was entitled "The Latin American Strike Movement," ran for 21-1/2 pages, and had 20 different subtitles.<sup>21</sup>

The CSLA engaged in self-criticism in good Bolshevik style and was subject to negative assessment by the Profintern and Comintern. Although the CSLA claimed that its affiliates "have taken the first steps toward organizing the fundamental branches of the proletariat of Latin America," its leaders were not by any means satisfied with their accomplishments. One CSLA document of early 1931 commented:

However, the revolutionary trade union movement of Latin America, too young in most of those countries, has revealed, parallel to all the progress and successes of the recent period, its undoubted backwardness and weakness, both from the political and ideological point of view, as well as in the realm of organization. Convenient preparation of the masses has not led in all areas to the creation of national trade union centers, centers that might say at this time exist only in nominal form in certain countries (Colombia, Peru), and in any case have not succeeded in transforming themselves into three centers of unification and giving combative leadership to the trade union movement of the class in their respective countries.<sup>22</sup>

Two years later, the 12th Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International was very critical of Communist trade union work in Latin America, particularly in the Caribbean area. A resolution of the Plenum said:

A general common characteristic of all the countries of the Caribbean is the fact that the basic proletariat remains still unorganized in class unions.... In all these countries... the organization of class unions and revolutionary oppositions in the reformist unions is lamentably missing. The Communist Parties must in the shortest time possible make a complete turn and concentrate all of their efforts on leading and organizing the economic struggles of the workers and organize the Party itself in the basic and strategic sectors of the proletariat in the Caribbean areas.

Interestingly enough, this resolution apparently had nothing to say about the activities—or lack of them—of CSLA.<sup>23</sup>

## ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES OF CSLA

CSLA sought to stimulate the organizing activities of its affiliates. It had at least three approaches to this problem: the establishment of regional subsidiaries of the Confederación composed of unions of workers of a



particular trade or industry, stimulation of competition among its affiliates to outdo one another in expanding their membership and activity, and production of a variety of periodicals and pamphlets at cheap prices for distribution by affiliated union groups.

One kind of union in which the Communists, and hence CSLA, had some following in several Latin American countries was that of port and maritime workers. It was among these that CSLA made its first attempt to establish a subsidiary group.

Almost immediately after the founding congress of CSLA, there met in Montevideo a maritime and port workers' conference, organized by the Federación Marítima of Uruguay, then headed by Eugenio Gómez, one of the principal Communist leaders of that country. Representatives of unions in Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Peru, and Colombia were present. It voted to establish the Comité Marítimo y Portuario Latino Americano that would affiliate with the RILU's International Committee of Propaganda and Action of Transport Workers. The meeting sent a message of greeting to the maritime of the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup>

The first (and apparently only) Plenum of the Comité Marítimo y Portuario Latino Americano met in Montevideo in March 1933. Invited to it were unions and "revolutionary trade union oppositions" in the field from Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. The meeting agenda included reports on conditions of port and maritime workers in various Latin American countries, a report on a world congress of RILU maritime and port unions recently held in Hamburg, Germany, "the struggle against war," and "renovation and consolidation" of the Comité Marítimo y Portuario Latino Americano.<sup>25</sup>

CSLA also sought to establish a Latin American regional organization of packinghouse workers. It summoned a congress of such unions in Montevideo in March 1930. It was to discuss the situation of those workers in various countries of the region, and to establish a continuing regional organization of those unions.<sup>26</sup> We have no information about whether such an ongoing organization was ever established.

In the case of teachers' unions, the CSLA apparently tried to get control of an already existing group, the Internacional del Magisterio Americano. *El Trabajador Latino Americano* noted in its December 15–30, 1929 edition that the CSLA forces had a big job in trying to get that group at its second congress "to abandon the ground upon which it now stands" and join CSLA. Apparently the CSLA forces did not succeed at that task, since the periodical noted in its March–April 1930 issue that the Internacional del Magisterio Americano Second Congress "has fallen totally into the hands of officialist elements, directors of public instruction, authorities of the bourgeois governments; the proletarians of teaching only had the insistent voice of the minority."

In 1932 CSLA adopted a process then popular in the Soviet Union of organizing a campaign of emulation among its various affiliates. It issued



a circular urging each affiliate to launch campaigns of trade union emulation, and to challenge one another to carry them out. By February 1932, the Argentine, Paraguayan, Uruguayan, Peruvian, and Chilean affiliates as well as the *Comité Marítimo y Portuario Latino Americano* had responded positively to this appeal.<sup>27</sup>

Although the emulation campaign had originally been supposed to end by the beginning of July 1932, it was decided to extend it for one month. CSLA also decided to give a banner to the national trade union center that best fulfilled the campaign.<sup>28</sup>

## THE SECOND CSLA CONGRESS

The second (and last) congress of CSLA was held early in 1933. The call of the Executive Committee of CSLA for this congress indicated that the following organizations would have "direct representation at that meeting: *Federación Obrera de Chile*, *Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba*, *Confederação Geral do Trabalho do Brasil*, *Confederación Sindical Unitaria de México*, *Confederación General del Trabajo del Uruguay*, *Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú*, *Comité de Unidad Sindical Clasista de Argentina*, *Comité Sindical Clasista del Paraguay*, *Comité Pro-CGT de Colombia*, *Federación Sindical Hondureña*, *Comité Pro-CGT del Ecuador*, *Confederación Obrera y Campesina de Panamá*, unnamed "trade union and revolutionary trade union oppositions" of Bolivia, Venezuela, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and other countries of the Caribbean.

The call to this congress also listed its agenda. The first item was "Four years of labor struggle of the *Confederación Sindical Latino Americana* and Lessons of the economic and political struggles in the countries of South America and the Caribbean, Report of the Executive."

The second agenda item was "Platform of immediate demands, for which the trade unions of South America and the Caribbean must struggle." The third was "The principal and most urgent tasks of organization of our trade union movement," followed by "For the turning of the trade union movement toward the conquest, organization and direction of the struggles of the agrarian wage earners."

The fifth item on the agenda was "The tasks of the revolutionary trade union movement in the struggle against imperialist wars. Against the Bolivian-Paraguayan and South American wars. For the defense of the USSR and of China." Finally, the last subject for the meeting of the Second CSLA Congress was "Renovation and strengthening of the leadership of the CSLA and its various organs."

The call to the congress listed the names of individuals who would be responsible for being the rapporteurs for each of the agenda items. It also went into considerably more detail than we have here concerning the subject matter that was to be dealt with under each segment of the agenda.<sup>29</sup>

## DEMISE OF CSLA

When the Communist International, under Stalin's direction, began its 180-degree change of strategy in 1934 from the Third Period isolation of Communist parties from virtually all other elements in the political spectrum to that of Popular Frontism and the formation of wide alliances with virtually any political group that professed to be antifascist, there was no place for Communist dual unionism. The policy became to merge Communist Party-controlled union organizations with those under different kinds of political influence. Thus, with the disappearance of avowedly Communist union groups on a national scale, there was no use for regional or world-wide organizations of those now largely nonexistent national union groups.<sup>30</sup>

Late in 1935 Miguel Contreras, the secretary-general of CSLA, commented favorably in *El Trabajador Latino Americano* on the liquidation of Communist-controlled union groups into a broader and politically more heterogeneous labor movement, although he did not explicitly describe the process in exactly those terms. He noted the mergers that had taken place in Mexico, Chile and Argentina, adding "And thus it is in all of the Latin American countries, in Peru, in Colombia, in Uruguay and Ecuador."<sup>31</sup>

Hence, the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana quietly disappeared. The American Communist leader William Z. Foster said, "The C.S.L.A. lasted until the middle of 1936, when it dissolved itself in favor of the larger movement then developing for a new organization, which eventually formed the Latin American Confederation of Labor (C.T.A.L.)."<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

1. Robert J. Alexander, *Communism in Latin America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 244.

2. Harrison George, "Latin American Workers Unite," *Labor Unity*, (New York, February 1929), p. 13.

3. *International Press Correspondence* (Moscow), December 22, 1927.

4. *Resoluciones de la Conferencia Sindical Latino Americana, Abril 1928* (Montevideo: Ediciones del Comité Pro Confederación Sindical Latino Americana, 1928), pp. 9-10.

5. George, "Latin American Workers Unite," p. 13.

6. *Resoluciones de la Conferencia Sindical Latino Americano*, p. 17.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

8. A. Losovsky, *El Movimiento Sindical Latino Americano—Sus Virtudes y Sus Defectos* (Montevideo: Ediciones del Comité Pro Confederación Sindical Latino Americana, 1929) (inside front cover).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

11. *Resoluciones de la Conferencia Sindical Latino Americana*, p. 14.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

13. Ricardo Martínez (onetime principal organizer and official of Confederación Sindical Latino Americana), interview with the author in Caracas, Venezuela, July 21, 1974.
14. *El Trabajador Latino Americano* (Montevideo), February 28–March 15–21, 1928.
15. *Ibid.*, April 15–30, 1929.
16. Losovsky, *El Movimiento Sindical Latino Americano*, p. 50.
17. Alexander, *Communism in Latin America*, p. 53.
18. *El Trabajador Latino Americano* (Montevideo), June–July 1929.
19. *Ibid.*, September–October 1929.
20. *Ibid.*, August 31–September 15, 1929.
21. *Ibid.*, August–September 1930.
22. *Suplemento de "La Lucha Obrera"* (Montevideo), March 1, 1931.
23. *El Comunista* (New York), April 1933, p.4.
24. *El Trabajador Latino Americano* (Montevideo), June–July 1929.
25. *Ibid.*, January–February 1933.
26. *Ibid.*, December 15–30, 1929.
27. *Ibid.*, January–February 1932.
28. *Ibid.*, May 1932.
29. *Ibid.*, January–February 1933.
30. Martínez, interview.
31. *El Trabajador Latino Americano* (Montevideo), October–November 1935.
32. William Z. Foster, *Outline Political History of the Americas* (New York: International Publishers, 1951), p. 521.

## CHAPTER 4

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# The Early Years of CTAL

The Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) was the first (and only) effort to bring together in one Latin American organization virtually all of the labor movements of the various Latin American countries. In its first years, it was, in fact, a very heterogeneous organization, ideologically. However, by the end of the World War II, CTAL had more or less completely come under the control of the Communists, and in its last two decades of existence, it was significant principally as being the Latin American grouping of labor movements that were controlled by Communist parties and that were affiliated with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

### CIRCUMSTANCES OF FOUNDING OF CTAL

A number of factors contributed to creating a situation that led to the formation in 1938 of CTAL. One of these was the general increase of Latin American labor movements in the interwar period. Another was the decline—and in many cases the virtual disappearance—from influence in organized labor of the anarchists, who were the political group most consistently opposed to collaborating in organized labor with people of other ideological orientations.

A third, very important, element in the situation in 1938 was the change in the policy of the Communist International that we have noted in an earlier chapter. By 1938, Stalin's Comintern—and consequently its member parties and the trade unions they controlled—had abandoned the Third Period insistence on the imminent outbreak of the world revolution, and

the need for the Communists to maintain their isolation from and bitter enmity toward all other elements of the political Left. Instead, the Comintern had adopted the policy of Popular Frontism which, among other things, called for liquidation of Communist Party-controlled labor movements into broader more heterogeneous, ones.

Finally, there was the particularly difficult position in which the Mexican government of President Lázaro Cárdenas found itself by the middle of 1938. It was in the process of carrying out a massive agrarian reform, it was nationalizing the railroads, and even more importantly, the oil industry. Many of those firms and individuals whose property had been seized were foreigners, particularly British and Americans, and the Cárdenas government faced severe diplomatic pressure and considerable hostile propaganda abroad.

In the face of this situation, President Cárdenas strongly supported the idea of the leaders of the new Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), headed by the onetime teacher Vicente Lombardo Toledano, to call a congress in Mexico City to organize a new labor confederation and bring together as many as possible of the labor movements of the Latin American countries, which would have a friendlier attitude toward the Mexican regime. The result of this invitation was the formation of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina. As Venezuelan labor leader Augusto Malavé Villalba commented, the founding of CTAL "was an answer to the campaign of the oil companies against Mexico."<sup>1</sup>

There had been at least one unsuccessful movement toward forming a unified Latin American labor organization. It was a meeting of a group of unionists from various Latin American countries attending the First American Conference of the International Labor Organization that met in Santiago, Chile, in January 1936. Those labor leaders, who included Socialists, Colombian Liberals, Communists, and others, decided to issue a statement in which they "[d]irected themselves to the workers of the American continent, exhorting them to work to bring about unity on a national basis," but then went on to speak of wider trade union unity. They said, "At the same time, we know that the proletariat of America has problems that are common and that, in order to achieve a prompt solution to them, which satisfies fully the aspirations of the mass that suffers and works, we believe it necessary to undertake immediately the indispensable task of constituting as soon as possible a vigorous continental organization of workers."<sup>2</sup> However, nothing concrete seems to have developed after that meeting.

It was left to the CTM to take the lead in calling the founding congress of CTAL. According to the 1938 invitation of CTM to participate in the CTAL founding meeting, CTM had in February 1936 agreed "to carry on intense work to convince the workers of Latin America of the urgent need for the existence of their unification, for the high purpose of better defending

their cause and contributing to obtaining complete independence and the progress of the twenty similar nations of the Western hemisphere.”<sup>3</sup>

## THE LAUNCHING OF CTAL

The Founding Congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina was officially called together by the National Council of CTM to meet between September 5 and 8, 1938. However, much previous work had gone into this call.

The official invitation to the CTAL meeting noted:

Concrete messages and those of a general character, abundant correspondence, the dispatch of special delegates, exchange of impressions with the leaders of the most important central labor groups of our continent, have been sufficient to bring together all the options in favor of the subject, but the CTM did not wish to undertake the preparations for an assembly of such great importance, or to proceed to convoke it until the most representative organizations of workers had expressed their complete conformity. . . . The principal obstacles have been overcome; all the central labor groups that exist and that have significance in the Latin American countries, indicated the city of Mexico as the place to have such a Congress, due, undoubtedly, to the atmosphere of freedom that is enjoyed in our country, and perhaps also the development of the labor movement that the CTM represents.

The CTM letter of invitation also proposed an agenda for the meeting: opening of the Congress with a report by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, secretary-general of CTM, about the antecedents of the Congress, followed by greetings from regular and fraternal delegates, on the first day; on the second day there would be election of the officials of the Congress and naming of committees to develop resolutions for the meeting, to be followed by reports of delegations on the situation of organized labor in their respective countries. The third day was to be taken up with discussion of the resolutions presented by the committees appointed the day before on “organization of the workers of Latin American and on the problems of general interest.” This discussion would be continued on the fourth day of the meeting, after which there would be the closing ceremonies.

The invitation also provided that each national labor group could send as many delegates to the congress as it wanted, but suggested three. For countries in which there were no central labor groups, the CTM National Council proposed that unions that wanted to be represented in Mexico should join together to name a delegation to represent all of them.

The CTM leaders also announced in their call to the CTAL Founding Congress that they were inviting all national union groups affiliated to the International Federation of Trade Unions, as well as “the organizations’ representative of the proletariat of the United States” (to send fraternal

delegates). It added that an official of the International Labor Organization (ILO) would also be present.<sup>4</sup>

Some organizations and individuals were specifically not invited to the CTAL Founding Congress. No unions in Brazil were sent invitations, so as to avoid the dictatorship of President Getúlio Vargas sending government stooges. Sir Walter Citrine, head of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), was not invited as a fraternal delegate because it was feared that he would not accept. William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, was invited, but refused to come.<sup>5</sup>

When the Founding Congress of CTAL gathered in Mexico City, there were delegations present from central labor groups in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Nicaragua, a Committee of Organization of Labor Unity in Uruguay, and a similar organization in Venezuela, where no central labor groups were yet functioning. Separate unions from Cuba were represented.

There were also fraternal delegates from union groups in France, Sweden, India, and the United States.<sup>6</sup> In the last case, it was the Congress of Industrial Organizations that was represented (John L. Lewis), the American Federation of Labor having refused an invitation.

As one of the last actions of the meeting, the resolution declaring the existence of CTAL was adopted. It was subsequently signed by all of the regularly accredited delegates to the meeting.<sup>7</sup>

At that same time, the statutes of the new confederación were adopted.

Insofar as the delegates from the trade union groups from various Latin American countries were concerned, the expense of bringing a substantial percentage (if not most) of them was undoubtedly borne by the Cárdenas government. Professor Frank Tannenbaum encountered on a flight from South America to Mexico a delegate from Paraguay headed for the founding CTAL meeting. When Tannenbaum asked the man if it was not quite expensive for him to make such a trip, the man replied that it was, but that he was a guest of the Mexican government, both on the air flight and in the hotel where he was going to stay in Mexico City.

During that same trip, when Tannenbaum was visiting the office of the Mexican ambassador to Bolivia in La Paz, someone burst into the office and said to the ambassador that "the Bolivian government is going to pay half of the price" for sending the Bolivian delegation to the CTAL meeting.<sup>8</sup>

## STATUTES AND RESOLUTIONS OF CTAL

The statutes of CTAL adopted at its founding congress began with a "Declaration of Principles." That declaration began with the statement: "The manual and intellectual workers of Latin America declare that the social regime that presently prevails in the greater part of the countries of the earth must be replaced by a regime of justice, based on abolition

of exploitation of man by man, on the democratic system as the means of governing the interests of the human community, on respect for the economic and political autonomy of each nation and on solidarity of all peoples of the world, proscribing forever armed aggression as an instrument for resolving international conflicts, and condemning the war of conquest as contrary to the interest of civilization."

The Declaration of Principles then proclaimed the need for unity of the workers within each country, within the hemisphere and in the world at large "to realize true international unity." It also proclaimed, "The principal task of the working classes of Latin America" to be "to obtain full economic and political autonomy of the Latin American nations, and to liquidate the semifeudal survivals that characterize those countries."

The declaration then proclaimed "that the workers of Latin America must enjoy without restriction the following rights, as the basis of the other social guarantees that the juridical regime of each country must contain: the right of assembly; the right of association; right of strike, right of collective contracting of labor; right of free expression of their ideas; freedom for press organs."

Finally, the Declaration of Principles declared "that fascism is contrary to the means and objectives of the proletariat, the progress of the peoples and the development of culture, as a result of which it must be combated in all its forms."

On the basis of this Declaration of Principles, the delegates to the Founding Congress of CTAL "in this decisive hour for the destinies of the working class, and of humanity, create the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina."

In providing the organizational structure of the new confederation, the CTAL statutes started out in Article 1 by proclaiming that the new organization "is made up of national central labor organizations of the Latin American countries that by statute adopt the same tactics and same objectives." Article 2 then provided that "one national central labor group for each country that represents the majority of the organized workers will be admitted as a member of the Confederación," and Article 3 proclaimed that "[t]he autonomy of the trade union movement of each country will be respected."

The organizational structure provided in the statutes of CTAL was relatively simple. There was to be a general congress, which should meet every three years (or more frequently if necessary and generally agreed upon) and would be the "sovereign" body of the organization. It was to consist of representatives of the affiliated national trade union centrals and the members of the Central Committee. Each affiliated national central labor body was to name up to three delegates to the general congress, with each national delegation casting one vote therein. Article 30 provided that "[i]n its General Congress resides the sovereignty of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina."



One of the functions of the General Congress was to elect its Central Committee, which was to consist of a president, two vice presidents, a secretary-general, and two regional secretaries. The president and secretary-general must reside in the city where the headquarters of the CTAL was located.

The Statutes provided that "[t]he president is the representative of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina." As it turned out, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the first and only president of the CTAL, completely lived up to that description. Over time, it became hard to think of Lombardo Toledano without thinking of CTAL, or vice versa.

In addition to adopting the statutes of CTAL, the Founding Congress also adopted a number of resolutions. These included one greeting "with sympathy" recent changes in Cuba that "commences to operate in a democratic sense." Another provided for the congress to "send messages to the chief executives of the Governments of America, demanding freedom for the workers arbitrarily jailed for fighting in favor of material and moral improvement of the exploited classes." It also passed a special resolution calling upon the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the United States to demand that the U.S. government release from jail the Puerto Rican nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos, and that it struggle "for the immediate recognition of the independence of Puerto Rico." There was a somewhat similar resolution requesting President Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua to release from jail a labor leader who was there "without just cause."

The CTAL Founding Congress "declared categorically" that it sought to bring about worldwide trade unity in the International Federation of Trade Unions. It urged all of the CTAL member organizations that did not yet belong to the IFTU to join it, and pledged that the CTAL itself "will from the first moment maintain close relations with the IFTU and collaborate with it so as to incorporate within it the central labor organizations of Latin America."<sup>9</sup> It must be noted, of course, that the Profintern, in conformity with the CI's Popular Frontism position, no longer existed.

## CTAL AND THE FIRST PART OF WORLD WAR II

Less than a year after the establishment of CTAL World War II began with the Nazi invasion of Poland. Then in the spring and summer 1940, the Nazis conquered Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries, and France, and Great Britain was left standing alone against the Hitler-Mussolini Axis, as it would remain until the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941.

During that first period of World War II, CTAL maintained a position concerning the conflict that in many ways was similar to that of the isolationists in the United States. However, in contrast to the U.S. isolationists, CTAL took what might be called a position of neutrality toward Great

Britain. This undoubtedly reflected the balance of power that then existed within the leadership of CTAL.

The Central Committee of CTAL, then consisting of President Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Vice President Francisco Pérez Leirós, secretary-general and vice president for the Northern Region, Fidel Velázquez, and secretary of the Southern Region, José María Argaña, met in Mexico City in June 1940. There it reviewed the situation of the labor movement in Latin America, and gave special attention to the impact of World War II in Latin America, and particularly on the labor movement there.

Resolution #9 adopted at this meeting was entitled "The Proletariat of America and European War." It began with the statement: "The workers of Latin America consider the present war, as that of 1914, is, in its essence, a struggle between two large groups of capitalist nations, over rivalries of an economic character and proposals of political domination, which are foreign to the working class, because not only has it not provoked the crisis, but because it is the only one to suffer its consequences."

However, the resolution continued, "The workers of Latin America consider that the present war in Europe presents characteristics more violent and deep than that of 1914, since in that epoch the economic and political organization of the capitalist countries was based still on the democratic institutions that made possible the historic progress of the bourgeoisie, whereas today that stage of its juridical organization has been displaced by forms that go from limitation of the rights of the working class to the establishment of violence as the legal government regime."

The resolution of the CTAL Central Committee then added another paragraph that began: "The workers of Latin America consider that fascism in its various forms has not been a fatal and irremediable stage in the historic evolution of the European countries, but that it could have been avoided, employing the procedures that all of the better oriented workers of the world have unanimously advocated in recent years." It then went on to argue that the labor movements of Latin America, because they saw recent fascist triumphs in Europe as being "a menace for the immediate and more distant future... must struggle openly and without truce and with enthusiasm, against the manifestations of fascism in the New World, cooperating in formation of a common front of all the countries of the Western Hemisphere in the face of this menace, and struggling against any government that in part of the world abandons democratic forces or conserves them only in appearance, to establish a regime of oppression for the working masses and the breakdown of individual and collective freedom."<sup>10</sup>

This resolution of the June 1940 meeting of the Council of CTAL combining the statement that the Latin American workers had no interest that would be served by their countries' entering World War II, with their clear call to fight fascism in Latin American countries, reflected the views of Socialist workers rather than Communists at that point. So did

Resolution #16's calls for the members of CTAL organizations to "cooperate to strengthen the ties of union among the trade union groups of the Latin American countries, as well as with those of the United States of North America and of Canada of various branches of the economy, with the purpose that at the opportune moment, the Central Committee of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina and the trade union organisms of Canada and the United States can jointly convoke continental congresses to establish industrial union organisms which include the workers of the New World."<sup>11</sup>

Of the four Latin American trade unionists adopting these resolutions, two, Francisco Pérez Leirós and José María Argaña, were Argentine Socialists. Fidel Velázquez was a Mexican trade unionist destined a few months later to succeed Vicente Lombardo Toledano as secretary-general of CTM. Only Lombardo Toledano himself had, as we shall see, sympathies for Stalinist Communism.

The Venezuelan labor leader Augusto Malavé Villalba maintained that the position developed at the 1940 General Council meeting was adopted "in spite of Communist opposition."<sup>12</sup>

## **CTAL AND THE WORLD WAR II NAZI INVASION OF USSR**

The position of CTAL, and particularly of Vicente Lombardo Toledano, with regard to World War II after the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Nazis in June 1941, changed drastically. Indication of the change in Lombardo's thinking on the subject was given in his speech opening the First Regular Congress of CTAL on November 22, 1941.

The CTAL president understandably devoted a substantial part of his time in that discourse to various aspects of World War II. He first reiterated CTAL's position of opposition to fascism in Latin American countries, elaborating on the dangers coming from Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and especially Franco's Spain.

Then, in contrast to the CTAL Council's argument that World War II was a renewal of the imperialist struggle in which the workers of Latin America should not get involved, Lombardo Toledano said: "To save America from fascism is not only to guarantee what exists here, but it is to make impossible the victory of fascism in Europe, even in the remote case that fascism would transitorily defeat with arms all of the peoples of the Old World."

Lombardo then turned special attention to support for the Soviet Union in the war. He said, "Our support of the Soviet Union must not be only a salute to the government of the USSR, and for the Red Army; it must be something more than a symbol, and economic material contribution, as [an] urgent, enthusiastic and constant stimulus from all the peoples of Latin America."

Lombardo elaborated further on his support of the Soviet in the war. He said:

It is a lie by the 'isolationists' in the United States, the Falangistas everywhere, and the criollo fascists in each nation, when they say that to aid the Soviet Union in this struggle signifies a contribution to the danger that throughout the world that must afterward come from communism. That is false, the ignorant bourgeoisie alarm themselves without valid reason of scientific validity, because we affirm that the laws of history and the experience of many years and attentive observation of the facts of today, show that the only thing the world has to gain, apart from the death and the desperation of the negative force of fascism, is the right of self-determination."

Lombardo Toledano completed this argument by saying:

In these countries where the objective conditions of their existence make possible an advanced democracy, an economic democracy based on social justice, that will be that fruit of the war, this will be the flourishing of real democracy. In those countries where, for internal causes and external ones, it will not be possible promptly to have more than the maintenance of a democracy with limitations, this will be result of the effort, product of the victory. There is, then, no danger except the danger of losing the possibility of living in accord with liberty.<sup>13</sup>

The CTAL Congress itself adopted a resolution that stated:

The C.T.A.L. declares in its First Ordinary Congress that the present war against the totalitarian regimes is the war of the Latin American peoples in defense of their dearest material and moral interests. It declares, furthermore, that this conflict is vital for the future of all the free peoples of the world, and for that reason issues a call today to the men and women, conscious that this war is THEIR WAR, to enthusiastically cooperate in the defense of the peoples who constitute at this moment the first trench in this historic and worldwide contest against tyranny and violence.<sup>14</sup>

## CTAL FIRST ORDINARY CONGRESS

The second full-fledged congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (known officially as the First Congress or First Ordinary Congress) was held in Mexico City in November 1941. The balance of political forces within CTAL had not shifted dramatically from what it had been in September 1938, when the organization was founded. Socialists still dominated the Argentine Confederación General del Trabajo. Socialists and Communists shared leadership of the Chilean Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile, with Socialist Bernardo Ibáñez as secretary-general. The Confederación de Trabajadores de México was still controlled by the government party, the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, although Lombardo Toledano had recently been superseded

as its secretary-general by Fidel Velázquez. One new confederation of significance, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, had been formed since the establishment of CTAL; it was controlled by a coalition of Communists and members of the so-called Partido Auténtico, with the former being dominant, although the Auténticos held important posts in the top leadership.

Had the congress been held six months earlier, there might have been strong differences of opinion among the delegates on a variety of issues, particularly World War II. Socialists and similar parties in Latin America had tended to be pro-Allies from the inception of the conflict, although not necessarily wishing their countries to get militarily involved in the war. The Communists, on the other hand, had between September 1, 1939 and June 22, 1941 claimed that World War II was an "inter-imperialist" conflict in which the workers had absolutely no interest. Of course, the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Nazis had brought a 180-degree turn in the Communists' attitude, making possible the more or less unanimous adoption of the resolutions concerning the war that we have already noted.

The First Regular Congress of the CTAL discussed other matters in addition to the war, and adopted a number of significant resolutions on those subjects, several of which dealt with economic questions. One of these called for "[d]iversification and replacement of production uncompetitive with other countries of the continent." Another demanded "intensification of cultivation and mining of products that the United States imports on the basis of guarantee of equitable prices that cover the costs of production." These "must involve improvement of the standard of living of wage earners and of all the factors that enter into production. The CTAL affiliates will struggle to obtain, maintain and improve the system of the living wage for all workers, in relation to the cost of living. Living wage is understood to mean that which provides the fundamentals such as food, habitation, clothing, culture and comfort."<sup>15</sup>

Another resolution called for "[e]stablishment of regular transport lines that unite all of the countries of the continent on the basis of use of the ships seized from the Axis, and those that were inactive in the ports, and additional transport that the governments of the continent would provide."

CTAL also called for "establishment of only government control of all America over exports, imports and exchanges and their maximum intervention in planning the production and exchange to achieve a harmonic continental coordination and diminish the intensification of the contradictions inherent in the capitalist forms of productions and exchange."<sup>16</sup>

Another resolution dealing with economic matters said, "The Congress of the CTAL understands that the policy of contracting loans and investments that the Latin American countries might undertake, must be oriented toward the achievement of harmonic development of labor and national production, within the framework of a necessary continental coordination."<sup>17</sup>

Finally, a resolution was passed that “declared emphatically that the policy of ‘Good Neighbor’ inaugurated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, is the first transcendental step in recent years to establish cordial relations between the peoples of Latin America and the United States of North America,” and was followed by another that stated:

The Congress of the CTAL considers it difficult to conceive of an authentic ‘Good Neighbor Policy’ based on exploitation of the weak countries that circle economically around a strong nation that has made public its desire to create in the New World a new concept of understanding among the peoples without imposition of economic and military hierarchy. Thus it empowers the Central Committee to make necessary negotiations to solicit from the Government of the United States the creation of an economic policy toward Latin America that is based, not on the interests of the great financial and commercial trusts, but on those of all peoples of our continent.<sup>18</sup>

### LOMBARDO TOLEDANO’S LATIN AMERICAN TOUR

Among the other decisions of the 1941 congress of CTAL, according to President Vicente Lombardo Toledano, was one instructing him to make an extensive tour to establish personal contact with the affiliates of the confederación. As he reported it later, “I visited twelve of the countries of our Hemisphere.... I have just been in Cuba, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.... Furthermore, I received direct news of other countries that it was not possible for me to visit.” These latter included Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Venezuela in South America, and Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico.

Lombardo sketched the outlines of his trip. He wrote:

I carried out, consequently, a voyage through all of the peoples of our America. I received of the larger part of them a direct impression, an impression of their peasant and worker masses, of the diverse sectors of their middle class, and of their political parties of a democratic character. I talked with the Presidents of the Republics and with many eminent functionaries of the governments; also I saw and observed the conduct and heard the speech and the opinions of the conservatives and reactionaries and of those who make up the ‘fifth column’.<sup>19</sup>

Wherever he went on this trip, Lombardo Toledano was received warmly by the leaders and members of the national trade union groups belonging to CTAL. Perhaps typical was the case of Bernardo Ibáñez, secretary-general of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile. Ibáñez, a Socialist who a few years later would become a bitter opponent of Lombardo, wrote glowingly of him in the introduction to a pamphlet containing the principal speech given by the CTAL leader when he was in Chile. Ibáñez wrote that this speech

[i]s the message of a leader of multitudes in the dramatic hour in which the world lives. We have listened to the emotion of the fifty thousand workers meeting on Sunday 25th of October of 1942 in the Plaza de la Constitución in Santiago de Chile.... Like all the works arising from the thought of the indisputable guide of the labor movement of the Americas, the speech that we publish is one more proof of the solidity of the philosophic, social and political ideas of the teacher that he is.

The Chilean leader finished his introduction to Lombardo Toledano's speech by saying:

The worthy President of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina has gained in direct contact with our people the sympathy and the estimation of all progressive sectors, and the Chilean workers have been able to know through the profundity of his work the leader who guides the action of the laboring masses of the Continent. May these words thank comrade Lombardo Toledano for his contribution to the struggle against fascism in Chile.<sup>20</sup>

Soon after his return to Mexico, Lombardo Toledano presented a long report on his trip in the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City. It was subsequently published in a pamphlet, full of pictures of his trip, many of them showing Lombardo Toledano meeting with various groups of people. The only picture of him with a president was that with the Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza.<sup>21</sup>

## LOMBARDO TOLEDANO'S OTHER AMERICAN TRAVELS

Subsequent to his 1942 visit to South and Central America, Lombardo Toledano made at least two other journeys to South America during World War II. In July 1942, he attended "in my capacity as President of CTAL" the congress in Santiago of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile. While there, he met with a group of Peruvian trade unionists who were also present, and successfully urged them to form a Committee for the Unification of the Workers of Peru.<sup>22</sup> That proved to be, in fact, the preliminary step for the establishment of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú.

Then in March 1944, the Council of CTAL met in Montevideo, Uruguay. Lombardo delivered a report on the state of CTAL to the meeting, and announced that on the way back to Mexico he was going to stop a few days in Brazil, and intended to speak with President Getúlio Vargas and Minister of Foreign Affairs Osvaldo Aranha. He also elaborated on the corporatist state nature of labor relations in that country, apparently hoping that he might be able to bring some pressure on Vargas and Aranha to change that situation.<sup>23</sup>



As it turned out, Lombardo Toledano never got an interview with President Vargas during this 1944 visit to Brazil, although he did have a chance to meet at some length with Osvaldo Aranha. He also gave two public talks, in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, and was able, in those cities as well as in Porto Alegre and São Paulo, to have "various private meetings with the most distinguished people among the democratic sector."<sup>24</sup>

Lombardo Toledano also visited the United States on several occasions during World War II. He sought to be recognized both by the U.S. labor movement and the U.S. government as the undisputed leader of the organized workers of Latin America. However, he fell short of attaining that goal.

In the early months of U.S. participation in World War II, Lombardo Toledano was reported to have sought to gain support of the AFL and CIO for the establishment of an inter-American labor confederation. When he was in Washington in March 1942, he was reported to have sought to interest Presidents William Green of the AFL and Phillip Murray of the CIO in calling a Continental Labor Congress. At the time, he commented, "The workers of the twenty sister nations of Latin America and their elected leaders are the only ones who can speak of united action between the United States and the rest of the Americas without raising the suspicions of Yanqui Imperialism." Neither Green nor Murray was apparently interested in Lombardo's idea.<sup>25</sup>

Early in 1944 an unfriendly source reported, "On three different trips to this country, he tried to win A.F.L. support, but his followers succeeded only in arranging a dinner sponsored by the New York City Industrial Council over which J. S. Potofsky presided and at which he nominated Lombardo for the Presidency of Mexico... His several trips to this country, and the publicity exploitation given to it by the Communist organization in Latin America made it appear, moreover, that he had the approval of the Government on the United States. This, of course, is not true."<sup>26</sup> In fact, before the War was over, plans already were under way by the AFL, supported by the Labor Division of the Office of Inter-American Affairs, to pave the way for establishment of a rival to CTAL.

## WARTIME MEETINGS OF CTAL COUNCIL

There were two meetings of the Council of CTAL that were important events for the confederación. Delegates attended from affiliated union groups and the meetings took on the nature of mini-congresses.

The first of these was held in Havana, Cuba, on the invitation of the invitation of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, late in July 1943. It had a seven-point agenda: "1. The effort of the Latin American workers to work more efficiently for the victory over Hitler and his allies; 2. Economic problems which now affect the peoples of Latin America; 3. Coordination



of the economic plans of all American countries. . . . 4. Examination of the internal political situation of each Latin American country. 5. Future political relations between Latin American and the United States; 6. Minimum program of economic development of the Latin American countries during the post-war; 7. Intervention of the international labor movement in the discussion of the problems of peace."<sup>27</sup>

The second wartime meeting of the Council of CTAL took place in Montevideo, early in 1944. Lombardo Toledano gave an opening address to this meeting, as well as an extensive report on the status of the Latin American labor movement. He dealt at some length with situations in several of the countries, including Chile, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Brazil, and Mexico.

Lombardo also dealt with two labor issues outside of Latin America. One was the worldwide labor conference that had been called by the British Trades Union Council, to which union groups had been invited regardless of their ideological orientation. He announced, "I answered the invitation of Comrade Citrine immediately, in my role as President of the CTAL, informing him that our organization would go to London, and that the CTAL would also be represented as an American Labor International."

The other extra-Latin American issue Lombardo dealt with was the hostility that the American Federation of Labor had shown against CTAL. He accused the AFL of planning to revive the Pan American Federation of Labor and denounced this effort, while at the same time stressing that CTAL had sought the friendship of the American Federation of Labor since inviting it to the founding congress of CTAL.

The Montevideo meeting passed 24 resolutions. Two dealt with the situation in Argentina where a military regime had seized power in June 1943, denouncing the efforts of the armed forces dictatorship to seize control of the labor movement (efforts that ultimately gave rise to the Perón regime), and calling on organized labor to resist the military regime and to stay loyal to its democratic traditions; the other demanded the release of political prisoners jailed by the Argentine military government.

A general resolution on the political situation of Latin America, which denounced tendencies toward fascism and similar regimes, particularly attacked the Spanish government of General Franco, to spread Axis influence through its "Hispanism" campaign. Two other resolutions dealt with the situation in Bolivia, accusing the regime of Major Gualberto Villarroel, which had recently seized power, of being an instrument of the Axis, and the antilabor and generally dictatorial regime of General Morínigo in Paraguay.

Other resolutions denounced the alleged efforts of the American Federation of Labor to split the Latin American labor movement, and pledged CTAL support for the world labor congress called by the British Trades Union Congress. Two others sent greetings to President Roosevelt and to the United Nations' Big Three, that is Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin.<sup>28</sup>

## CTAL PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

CTAL sought to make its voice heard at several international meetings during World War II and immediately after the end of the conflict. One of these was the Second Inter-American Conference of Agriculture held in Mexico City in July 1942. There, together with the National Labor Council of Mexico, it presented a study prepared by Lombardo entitled "The Principal Problems of Agriculture and of the Economy of the American Continent." It consisted mainly of a series of resolutions that CTAL proposed that the inter-American conference adopt. These dealt with "Products of Importance at the Present Time," "Trade and Credit," and "Rural Organization." Among the specific recommendations embodied in these proposed resolutions were the stimulation of economic self-sufficiency in Latin American countries, breaking the control of monopolies over international trade in agricultural products, and encouragement by governments of development of various cooperatives among Latin American peasants. Interestingly enough, there is no specific suggestion of widespread agrarian reform. These proposals of Lombardo Toledano on behalf of CTAL were published in both Spanish and English, for "diffuse distribution."<sup>29</sup>

CTAL, in the person of its president, sought to present its views to the Chapultepec Conference, the meeting of the American countries preceding the San Francisco Conference that established the United Nations Organization. Lombardo Toledano and CTAL said that they sought to put forth "three great objectives." These were "A) Full economic autonomy of each of the nations of Latin America; B) The economic development of their respective countries; [and] C) The elevation of the material and cultural conditions in which the great masses of the people live."

The Lombardo-CTAL statement was particularly critical of the so-called Clayton Plan, put forward by the U.S. delegates to the Chapultepec Conference, which urged the need for free trade among the American nations, and the importance of unhampered foreign investment in the Latin American economies. The statement stressed, among other things, the need for Latin America to have tariff protection for the new industries that it needed to create, and the necessity for control by the Latin American governments over foreign investment within their economies.

This document of CTAL on the Chapultepec Conference, included, in addition to the Lombardo-CTAL statement, the actual resolutions adopted at the conference, as well as the specific details of the Clayton Plan. There is no indication that it was published in any language but Spanish.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, CTAL took a very active part in the Third Inter-American Conference of the International Labor Organization that was held in Mexico City in April 1946. Delegates from union groups affiliated with CTAL took the lead in refusing to accept representatives of the Peronista-controlled

Argentine Confederación General del Trabajo as members of the Workers Group in the conference. They were supported in this by French and British worker delegates.<sup>31</sup> Lombardo Toledano introduced an amendment to the ILO constitution providing for two worker delegates, two governmental ones, and one employer representative from each country, instead of one representative of each group, a motion that was not passed.<sup>32</sup>

## CTAL AND FORMATION OF NATIONAL CENTRAL LABOR GROUPS

One of the principal tasks that CTAL undertook was to encourage the establishment of central labor organizations in those countries in which they did not exist. This was in conformity with the provision of the statutes of the organization that it consisted of such national central labor groups.

The first success in this effort was achieved in Cuba. Among the delegates to the CTAL Founding Congress were representatives of several of the island republic's industrial labor unions, drawn from the three political tendencies then most active in the Cuban labor movement, that is, the Communists, the Auténtico Party, and independents.

At the conclusion of the CTAL congress, these Cuban delegates signed an agreement to work together to bring into existence a new central labor body in Cuba. A few months later, with the concordance of General Fulgencio Batista, the country's dominant political figure, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba was established.<sup>33</sup>

In his report to the Montevideo meeting of the Council of CTAL early in 1944 Lombardo Toledano reported on the establishment of a Costa Rican central labor group with the aid of CTAL. He said: "There existed before, the Comité de Trabajadores de Costa Rica, which at first was a kind of federation of unions of the capital, and which later was converted into a preparatory committee for the organization of a Congress of National Labor Unity. When it was considered appropriate, this Committee, in accord with the Presidency of CTAL, convened the Congress... for the month of September of 1943. Thus there emerged from this assembly the Confederación de Trabajadores de Costa Rica."<sup>34</sup>

At the Montevideo meeting, Lombardo also reported on moves to establish a central labor body in Peru. He reported that during the Congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile in June 1943, which he attended, a group of Peruvian trade union leaders, representing the political tendencies then active in the labor movement, decided to establish a Comité Nacional de Unificación de los Trabajadores del Perú, which they did upon their return to Lima.<sup>35</sup> A few months later, this committee gave rise to the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú.

Lombardo Toledano also recounted the difficulties that the Ecuadorian labor movement was having to establish a central labor confederation.

He noted that President Arroyo del Rio had broken up "an assembly convoked by the groups of workers of Ecuador under the leadership of the CTAL." However, he said, in spite of this there had been created a *Comité Nacional de Trabajadores del Ecuador*, headed by Pedro Saad as secretary-general, which was continuing to work toward establishment of a national labor confederation."<sup>36</sup> A few months later, after the fall of Arroyo del Rio, the *Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador* was established.

The CTAL president likewise noted the recent formation in Panama of a *Comité de Trabajadores de Panamá*. He said that the organization "proposes to develop the workers' unions in accordance with the true characteristics of the country and to be a factor within CTAL to amplify the labor movement of our hemisphere."<sup>37</sup>

There had also been formed a central labor group in Bolivia, the *Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia*, that joined CTAL. It was captured by the *Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (PIR), the country's Communist-inclined party.<sup>38</sup>

Another national central organization that joined CTAL in 1943 was the *Confederación Dominicana del Trabajo* of the Dominican Republic.<sup>39</sup> Its origins owed nothing to CTAL, considerably antedating the Latin American group. It was by 1943 completely dominated by the government of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, undoubtedly the most tyrannical dictator then in control of any Latin American country.

At the time of the 1943 Havana meeting of the Council of CTAL, Lombardo Toledano had announced that he had received an invitation to visit the Dominican Republic.<sup>40</sup> However, we have no indication that he actually made that trip. Nonetheless, even without having done so, Lombardo and other CTAL leaders were willing to accept into their ranks the puppet of the Dominican dictator for reasons that to this day remain unexplained.

One effort of CTAL to help the establishment of a national central labor body was not successful. That was in Venezuela. Vicente Lombardo Toledano was present, having been invited to participate in the meeting. However, when one of the delegates to the congress argued that the Communists should have majority control of the new organization since they had a majority in the congress, President Isaías Medina Angarita ordered the closing of the congress, and at that point no new central labor group was established.<sup>41</sup> In his report to the Montevideo meeting, Lombardo Toledano concluded that "we can say that within the countries that from the beginning participated in the life and the creation of CTAL there is no labor organization that has failed to join our Latin American Trade Union International. Except Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, all the other organisms of all the Latin American countries form part of our International."<sup>42</sup>

## NOTES

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6. C.T.M. 1936–1941, pp. 559–561.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 582–584.
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15. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
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21. Lombardo Toledano, *Prolegómenos*, p. 3.
22. *Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina* (C.T.A.L.) *Reunión de Montevideo, Febrero-Marzo 1944* (México, DF, 1944) (hereafter CTAL *Reunión de Montevideo*), pp. 11–12.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
24. *Segundo Congreso General de la Confederación de Trabajadores de la América Latina, Cali, Colombia, Diciembre 1944* (México, DF, n.d.) (ca. 1945) (hereafter CTAL *Cali Congress*), pp. 38–39.
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28. See CTAL *Reunión de Montevideo*.

29. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *Los Principales Problemas de la Agricultura y de la Economía del Continente Americano* (México: Consejo Obrero Nacional and Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, 1942).
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35. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
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39. *CTAL Cali Congress*, p. 10.
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## CHAPTER 5

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# The Declining CTAL and Its Successor

The World War II years were for the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina the period of its greatest activity and, with one major exception—the withdrawal from affiliation of the Confederación General del Trabajo of Argentina—of its most rapid growth, at least in terms of the number of national trade union movements in its ranks. However, before the war was completely over, there had begun a process that would lead to its rapid decline, its ultimate extinction and its replacement by an entirely new organization.

The third general congress of the confederación, known officially as the Second General Congress, took place in Cali, Colombia, in December 1944. This may be said to have been the high point in the history of CTAL.

There were regular delegates present at this congress from affiliates in Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela. There were also fraternal delegates from Canada, the exile Unión General de Trabajadores of Spain, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most notable was the presence of a delegate from the Confederación Dominicana del Trabajo, the puppet labor organization of General Rafael Trujillo.<sup>2</sup>

The first day's session of the congress was taken up with greetings of various kinds, delivered in person or in written messages that were read to the audience. Those who personally greeted the assembled delegates included the mayor of Cali, the Colombian minister of labor, as well as representatives of the Colombian Liberal and Democratic Socialist parties, the latter being the rechristened Communist Party. Messages were



read from the presidents of Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Chile, and Venezuela.<sup>3</sup>

The first session of the Cali Congress was brought to a close by a speech by CTAL President Lombardo Toledano. This was devoted principally to the war that was then in progress, and which he said was not "an armed conflict between bands but a profound ideological war." He reiterated the CTAL's support for the Allies in that conflict, and recounted his own work in spreading that message "to the Indians, mestizos and Negroes, to mulattoes and whites." He said, "The hour of socialism has not arrived. This is the hour of real democracy, with real content, not the archaic formal democracy lacking true human significance."

Lombardo also warned about the forces in Latin America and elsewhere that were working against the victory of this democracy. He particularly attacked the Argentine military regime.<sup>4</sup>

In the next session of the congress, Lombardo Toledano delivered a very extensive report, recounting the activities of CTAL since the First Congress in November 1941. He noted the meetings of the Central Committee of the CTAL in Havana in July 1943 and in Montevideo early in 1944. He also recounted his own tour of South and Central America from August to December 1942, and his subsequent visits to labor congresses in Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela, and his not very fruitful trip to Brazil.

Lombardo also quickly traced the progress of the war, in both Europe and Asia. Finally, he looked to the future of CTAL, stressing the need for developing central labor groups in countries where they did not exist, and putting special stress on the importance of the participation of CTAL and its affiliates in the world-wide labor congress that had been called by the British Trades Union Congress.<sup>5</sup>

Considerable time in the congress was taken up with reports from the individual delegations on the economic, social, and political situation in their respective countries. Summaries of these reports were published in the official pamphlet of CTAL about its Cali Congress.

Of course, a large number of resolutions were adopted by the meeting. They covered the widest range of subjects. Some dealt with specifically wartime problems, such as support for the establishment of military bases necessary to fight the war, to seeking U.S. help with some of the economic problems encountered by the conflict, to endorsement of General Charles de Gaulle as the spokesman for the Free French in Allied councils.

Other resolutions dealt with postwar problems, such as maintenance after the war of the alliance of the Big Three, punishing the Axis leaders who were held guilty for the war, as well as making the German and Japanese peoples responsible for their share of the blame for allowing their governments to perpetuate their wartime outrages. Postwar application of the Atlantic Charter and the agreements of the Big Three at Tehran were also endorsed.

On another level, resolutions endorsed the mounting in the postwar era of a massive process of industrialization in Latin America, as well as campaigns to get rid of the semifeudal remnants in these countries. The struggle to bring democratic regimes to all Latin American countries was endorsed, and meanwhile, some resolutions denounced the situation in some individual countries, including fascist Argentina and the military dictatorship in El Salvador.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, a new constitution was adopted for the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina. The most significant change was replacement of the three vice presidents representing the North, Center, and South of Latin America, who in the original statutes of CTAL had supposedly had a role in orienting the affiliates in the areas of their competence. In their place, the Central Committee would now consist of the president and eleven other members elected by the General Congress of the organization.<sup>7</sup>

Another important change in the structure of CTAL was the establishment of the post of adjunct commissioners in the organizational hierarchy, who, according to the new constitution, "as were deemed necessary to fulfill their functions" could be appointed by the Central Committee. Their tasks were described as "aides to the Presidency and Central Committee," and it was provided that "they will be proposed by the President with the approval of their respective national central labor bodies, and will act in the headquarters of the confederation."<sup>8</sup>

In the next few years, these posts of adjunct commissioners were to be very significant. They served to help cement the relations between CTAL headquarters and its national affiliates, and also were sometimes used as training ground for new leaders, particularly in countries in which political change made the establishment and growth of a trade union movement possible to a degree that had not theretofore been the case.

## COMMUNIST DOMINATION OF CTAL

The Cali Congress was the last time that CTAL appeared to be what it had in fact been at its inception, that is, a united front labor organization made up of union groups of diverse political orientation and ideology. It was also the first time that domination of the organization clearly passed to the Communists.

This Communist control of CTAL was evident both in the internal workings of the meeting and in its choice of a new Central Committee. Four resolutions committee chairmen were named in the Cali Congress. These were Pedro Saad of Ecuador for the Committee on Political Affairs, Enrique Rodríguez of Uruguay for the Committee on Organization, Juan Vargas Puebla of Chile for the Committee on Social Affairs, and Fidel Velázquez of Mexico for the Committee on Economic Affairs.<sup>9</sup> Saad, Rodríguez, and

Vargas Puebla were leading figures in the Communist parties of their respective countries.

The same situation prevailed in the Central Committee of CTAL elected in Cali. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, of course, was reelected as president. The other 11 members elected to the Committee were Francisco Pérez Leirós and Rubens Iscaro of Argentina, Napoleón Molina of Colombia, Rodolfo Guzmán of Costa Rica, Lázaro Peña of Cuba, Juan Vargas Puebla and Juan Briones of Chile, Pedro Saad of Ecuador, Fidel Velázquez of Mexico, Juan P. Luna of Peru, and Enrique Rodríguez of Uruguay.<sup>10</sup> Of these 12 men, 7 were leading Communist trade unionists in their respective countries: Iscaro, Guzmán, Peña, Vargas Puebla, Pedro Saad, Juan P. Luna, and Enrique Rodríguez.

The Communists achieved control over CTAL by several methods. One was the fact that the influence of Communists in the various national labor movements had grown markedly during the Popular Front phase—in spite of temporary abandonment of that policy between September 1939 and June 1941.

This influence was particularly notable in the new national central labor movements that developed after the establishment of CTAL. In the first of these, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), which was established a few months after the founding of CTAL, Communist control of the CTC was assured by the deal that General Fulgencio Batista had worked out with them in 1937–1938. Lázaro Peña, the Communist leader of the Tobacco Workers Federation, was secretary-general of the CTC from its inception.

In the case of the new Confederación de Trabajadores de Costa Rica, Communist control of the group was assured by the fact that they had been the ones who had taken the leadership in establishing a trade union movement in that country in the 1930s. In Peru, the situation was somewhat similar to that of Cuba. The establishment of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú was permitted by dictator Manuel Prado, provided that it was not controlled by the Aprista Party, the country's major mass party. This meant that it would be led by the Communists, who were the principal competitors of the Apristas in the labor movement.

In the case of Bolivia, the pro-Communist Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria, one of several parties to emerge after the end of the Chaco War (1932–1935), had been influential in organizing factory workers, and railroaders had succeeded in gaining control of the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia. Their control of most of the labor movement was not challenged successfully until after the coup of December 1942 which, for the first time, brought the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) to power (as partners of young military men).

In Uruguay, the Communists and Socialists were the principal political parties active in the labor movement. When a new central labor group, the Unión de Trabajadores del Uruguay, was established in 1942, they shared

power within the new organization, but the secretary-general was the Communist Enrique Rodríguez.

In Ecuador, the situation was somewhat similar to that in Uruguay. The Socialists and Communists were the principal political elements operating within the labor movement, and when a new *Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador* (CTE) was organized after the overthrow of President Arroyo del Río in 1944, these two parties shared the leadership, with Pedro Saad as secretary-general. The Ecuadorian Socialists never clearly differentiated their philosophy and ideology from that of the Communists and so never withdrew the CTE from CTAL, even after the Socialists won control of it.

Another major factor in the emergence of Communist control in CTAL was what happened in the labor movement of Argentina after the military coup of June 4, 1943. A few months before that event the *Confederación General del Trabajo*, the country's most important central labor organization, had split, one faction that became popularly known as CGT#1 remaining largely allied with the Socialist Party. The other, CGT#2, had a coalition of dissident Socialist and Communist leadership.

With the seizure of power by the military, the new regime outlawed and effectively suppressed CGT#2. Colonel Juan Perón, in his capacity as secretary of labor and social welfare of the military government, worked with a combination of the carrot and the stick to get control of CGT#1. By the time of the Cali Congress of the CTAL, he had largely succeeded in winning the support of the majority of Argentina's workers. CGT#1 officially withdrew from CTAL.

Both Francisco Pérez Leirós (a Socialist) and Reubén Iscaro, who were elected to the new Central Committee of CTAL in Cali, had been associated with CGT#2. But as we have noted, it soon went out of existence after June 1943. Pérez Leirós returned to activity in the Socialist Party. He did not attend the Cali CTAL meeting.

The importance of the withdrawal of the Argentine labor movement from CTAL was a determining factor in the ideological orientation of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina*. Together with the CTM, it had been one of the two largest and most important national union groups belonging to CTAL. After its departure from the scene, the CTM remained the only major CTAL national central labor group in which the Communists were not serious competitors for control.

In the years immediately following the Cali Congress, Communist domination of CTAL was intensified. One reason was that several additional national central labor centers that affiliated with CTAL were Communist controlled. This was the case with the CTG of Guatemala and the CGTB of Brazil. However, a more important factor was the splits that took place in several CTAL affiliates. The CTP of Peru was captured by the Apristas in 1945 after the restoration of democracy. When the new CTP leadership requested of Lombardo Toledano that someone nominated by them be

named to succeed Juan P. Luna on the CTAL Central Committee, he refused, whereupon the CTP withdrew from CTAL. The Communists later withdrew their unions from the CTP, and affiliated them directly with CTAL.

In 1946, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile* split into two organizations. One was under Socialist Party leadership and withdrew from CTAL. The other (larger) one was dominated by the Communist Party and remained in CTAL.

A split also occurred in the *Unión General de Trabajadores del Uruguay*, between the Communists, who continued to control the UGT, and the Socialists. The UGT remained in CTAL, while the unions controlled by other political groups finally established a rival to it in the early 1950s.

After the expulsion of Lombardo Toledano from the *Confederación de Trabajadores de México*, the CTM withdrew from CTAL, thus taking the last non-Communist national trade union group out of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina*.

## THE ROLE OF VICENTE LOMBARDO TOLEDANO

Vicente Lombardo Toledano, as president of the CTAL, certainly did not do anything to prevent Communist assumption of control of his organization. The fact was he was himself a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist by that time.

Lombardo was an intellectual. Among his other degrees was that of Doctor of Philosophy from the National University of Mexico. His trade union career began when, in August 1920, he became secretary-general of the League of Professors of the Federal District. Seven years later, he became secretary-general of the National Federation of Teachers.

Meanwhile, in 1925, he became a member of the Central Committee of the country's largest central labor organization, the *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM), headed by Luis Morones. As such, he was also a significant figure in CROM's political party, the *Partido Laborista*. In that capacity, he served as a member of the municipal council of Mexico City, twice as a member of the Chamber of Deputies, and was also acting governor of the state of Puebla in 1923–1924.<sup>11</sup>

Although a member of the highest official body of CROM, Lombardo was admitted to the *Grupo Acción*, the inside group that dominated the confederation. However, for a while he served as secretary-general of CROM's federation in the Federal District.

As CROM began to crumble after 1928, Lombardo Toledano became increasingly critical of the *Grupo Acción*. Finally, in October 1933, he broke away from CROM, and taking a considerable number of unions with him, established the *Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México*. Then, when President Lázaro Cárdenas fell out politically with his former mentor, ex-President Plutarco Elías Calles, who had the support of what remained of CROM, Lombardo Toledano took the lead in seeking to mobilize the rest of the labor movement behind Cárdenas and his

sweeping reform program. The result of these efforts was the establishment in February 1936 of the CTM, which at least for a short while had the great majority of the country's labor movement in its ranks. Vicente Lombardo Toledano was its secretary-general.<sup>12</sup> It was in that capacity that he, with the backing of General Cárdenas, organized CTAL.

By the time he became head of the CTM, Lombardo Toledano was by conviction a Marxist-Leninist. However, he had taken some years to reach that intellectual position. His biographer, Robert Paul Millon, noted that before he became deeply involved in the labor movement, he was "typical of the liberal, middle-class intellectuals who supported the revolutions."<sup>13</sup>

Millon believed that it was Lombardo's immersion in the labor movement that brought his ideas in a Socialist direction. He noted that when Lombardo attended a conference in New York City in 1925, he sought out Marxist works in local bookstores, including the three volumes of *Das Capital*. Millon concludes that "Lombardo was a Marxist by 1930,"<sup>14</sup> but added that he "still may be considered an evolutionary socialist in the tradition of the Second International."<sup>15</sup>

In 1935, Lombardo took his first of several visits to the Soviet Union. Upon returning home, he wrote, among other things, an essay *50 Verdades sobre la U.R.S.S. (50 Truths About the U.S.S.R.)*. Among these "truths" about Stalin's Soviet Union were the following:

5. The dictatorship of the proletariat consists in government of the workers, by the workers and for the workers: it is true democracy... 12. No one had imposed upon the people of the U.S.S.R. the perfect discipline in which it lives; the rhythm of their own labor has converted each man and each woman into notes of a great social symphony... 22. In the majority of the capitalist countries one can be assured that almost all the individuals who travel in their own cars are exploiters of their fellows. In the U.S.S.R. for each individual who owns an automobile the people have a smile of sincere gratitude... 39. Premeditated political propaganda is foreign to the esthetic doctrine of the Soviet regime.<sup>16</sup>

Robert Millon noted that "Lombardo continued to be an ardent and uncritical supporter of the domestic and foreign policies of the Soviet Union. In a speech delivered in 1942, Lombardo praised the genuineness of Soviet democracy and Soviet justice. 'The U.S.S.R. is the only country in which justice is law, true law, law which never is violated, law which is applied inflexibly.'"

Lombardo's loyalty to both Stalin and the post-Stalin Soviet Union did not change. As Millon wrote, "Since World War II Lombardo has supported the Soviet position on all major international issues of the Cold War, ranging from opposition to the Marshall Plan to condemnation of United States intervention in the Korean War and to support of the policies of peaceful coexistence and universal disarmament."

Millon went on to note, "Respecting Soviet domestic affairs, Lombardo continued an ardent admirer of Stalin and his policies during his lifetime.



In 1949, Lombardo wrote a short article in the Soviet newspaper *Trud* in honor of Stalin's birthday. The following year he praised Stalin as one of the three greatest men of the century—along with Lenin and Mao.<sup>17</sup>

Lombardo not only continued to have a little but praise for Soviet internal and international affairs; he also found little to criticize in the East European countries, with the exception of Tito's Yugoslavia. Of what some had called the satellite countries, Lombardo wrote, "The supposed subordination to the Soviet Union of the nations with people's democrats is nothing but a natural, historically necessary and legitimate alliance among the peoples who have abolished the capitalist regime in order to form the socialist world."<sup>18</sup> However, he denounced Yugoslavia for its "theoretical discrepancies" and for its "treason" in pursuing the "autarchical conception of a socialist economy in such a small nation."<sup>19</sup>

However, although a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist by conviction, Lombardo Toledano never joined the Mexican Communist Party. Undoubtedly he did not do so in part because to do so would have been to cut himself off from any connection with the mainstream of Mexican politics. However, it was also the case that there was a history of conflict and rivalry between Lombardo and the Communists.

The most egregious instance of this conflict occurred a few months after the establishment of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México. The Communists' small trade union group organized during the Comintern's Third Period and had joined in the formation of the CTM (in pursuance of the Comintern Popular Front line); when they were unable to get control of the new Confederación, they led a split in it. However, in this move they ran up against the opposition of Earl Browder, chief of the Communist Party of the United States.

Annoyed at the Mexican Communist leadership who had resisted conforming to the Gauleitership that Browder had assumed over the Latin American Communist parties after the 1935 Seventh Congress of the Comintern, Browder ordered his party's newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, to publish Lombardo Toledano's version of the CTM split instead of that the Mexican Communists. They thereupon sent a delegation to New York to protest to Browder. However, after about 10 days the delegation finally agreed to the reunification of the CTM under Lombardo Toledano's leadership. But they asked Browder to go to Mexico to appear before the special party congress called to deal with the issue. He went to Mexico City, where he talked not only with his fellow Communists, but with Lombardo Toledano and President Cárdenas as well. Thus, the CTM was once again more or less reunited.<sup>20</sup> However, Lombardo Toledano commented many years later that this split engendered by the Communists had had a long-run negative impact on the CTM, since some unions that had broken with the confederation with the Communists did not return to its ranks.<sup>21</sup>

In 1940, Lombardo was eased out of the top post in the CTM, but still remained among its top figures. However, after the end of World War II

he pushed the idea of establishing a new labor and peasant party, with the consequent withdrawal of the trade union and peasant movements from the government party, the Partido de la Revolución Mejicana. At first, the Central Committee of the CTM supported this idea, but then turned against it, and when Lombardo Toledano insisted on going ahead in establishing the new party, he was expelled from the CTM.<sup>22</sup>

With his ouster from the CTM, Lombardo Toledano lost his principal power base and his claim to leadership of the Mexican labor movement. However, he and his followers set about trying to organize a major rival to the CTM. In conversation with me in August 1948, he said that he hoped to have a new central labor group based on the railroaders, oil, electrical, and sugar workers and various others, as well as a large part of the peasantry who had until then been in the Confederación Nacional Campesina, which was also a part of the government party.<sup>23</sup>

In 1949 he and his supporters established the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM). However, the UGOCM certainly did not measure up to Lombardo's hopes and expectations. Karl M. Schmitt noted concerning the UGOCM: "Until late 1956 its strongest subgroup was the National Federation of Sugar Cane Workers (Federación Nacional de Cañeros—FNC) with headquarters in Veracruz. With the withdrawal of the FNC in December 1956, the UGOCM center of strength shifted to the northern state of Sonora. Other concentrations of lesser importance existed in Sinaloa, Chiapas, Michoacán and Guerrero." Writing in 1965, Schmitt said, "The UGOCM has an estimated membership of 20,000 divided into about fifteen state federations, which in turn are composed of a number of regional and local unions. Agricultural workers make up the bulk of its membership."<sup>24</sup>

The Partido Popular, which Lombardo headed, at first sought to be a broad organization dedicated to completing the Mexican Revolution. However, the Third National Assembly of the party in 1960 changed its name to Partido Popular Socialista, and declared itself Marxist-Leninist, and decreed that it should henceforward be governed by "democratic centralism."<sup>25</sup>

By the 1950s, Lombardo Toledano occupied a peculiar position in Mexican public affairs. What prestige and influence he continued to have in Mexico was based in large degree on his supposed international prestige as the continuing head of CTAL and vice president of the World Federation of Trade Unions, while his importance in the international Communist trade union movement arose largely from his supposed influence in Mexican political life.

## THE 1946 CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING

The first postwar general meeting of CTAL was that of the Central Committee in San José, Costa Rica in December 1946. In addition to the members



of the Central Committee, there were present representatives of the CTM, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Nicaragua*, the *Federación de Sindicatos de Panamá*, the *Petroleum Workers Federation* and the *Federación Sindical del Distrito Federal y Estado Miranda* of Venezuela, the *Mine and Metal Workers Union* of Mexico, and several unions from El Salvador. O. K. Knight of the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the United States was a fraternal delegate.

Messages were read from the World Federation of Trade Unions, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* of France, and the presidents of Mexico, Costa Rica, and Chile.

The meeting resolved that CTAL was the general representative of the Latin American workers, and asserted its independence of all governments, political parties, and churches. It also took note of a "separatist campaign" to undermine the unity of CTAL that was then underway, and endorsed President Vicente Lombardo Toledano's proposal to take the offensive against the campaign.

The Committee went on record as fighting against international monopolies that were trying to dominate the natural resources, markets and manpower of Latin America. It also rejected any proposal hindering the industrialization of Latin America. On a broader international issue, the Central Committee passed a resolution saying that any regional pact with the object of preparation for war without previous approval of the Security Council of the United Nations would be in violation of the UN charter.

The meeting passed several resolutions dealing with labor and trade union matters. One urged reestablishment of trade union unity in Argentina, another urged the founding of a unified central labor body in Bolivia. Congratulations were sent to the *Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores do Brasil*, which had recently been established, and to a conference of Central American workers' organizations.

Other resolutions demanded freedom of association for Guatemalan agricultural workers, condemned the persecution of unions in Honduras, and noted with satisfaction the establishment of a *Confederación de Trabajadores* in Nicaragua. Two other resolutions denounced racial persecution in the Panama Canal Zone, and requested all Panamanian labor organizations to affiliate with CTAL. Finally, there was a resolution expressing satisfaction with the establishment of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Dominicanos* with the aid of the Cuban and Mexican affiliates of CTAL.<sup>26</sup>

## **CTAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATION BY TRADE OR INDUSTRY**

CTAL was from its inception a confederation of national central labor organizations. However, on occasion it accepted the affiliation of a union of a particular trade or industry in a country, and only fitfully worked to bring together within its own ranks regional organizations of unions of

particular trades or industries into something approaching the International Trade Secretariats on a world level.

However, in September 1946 a Congress of Latin American Petroleum Workers sponsored by CTAL was held in the Mexican port of Tampico. There were present delegates from petroleum workers in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.

Among those speaking to this meeting were Antonio J. Hernández, the head of the Mexican government oil monopoly Pemex, who came as the representative of Mexican President Miguel Alemán, and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who was honorary chairman of the oil congress. Messages were also received from Mexican ex-President Lázaro Cárdenas and Miguel Avila Camacho.

The meeting decided to take the collective agreement reached between Pemex and the Oil Workers Federation as its model for the rest of the oil industry in Latin America. It also set forth a long list of things that the other unions should seek to achieve in their negotiations with their employers.

Finally, the Tampico meeting established a Petroleum Workers International Coordination and Defense Committee with the following objectives: "(a) to coordinate the efforts of Latin American petroleum workers to secure satisfaction for their demands; and (b) to promote the unification of petroleum workers, both national and international, on the basis of respect for democratic union procedure." Although it was provided that "[t]he Committee will be affiliated to the C.T.A.L. as an auxiliary agency and will be subject to the latter's rules," there is little indication that this organization had much further activity.<sup>27</sup>

In February 1953 a CTAL-sponsored Inter-American Conference of Miners, Metallurgical and Mechanics Workers met in Mexico City. It was reported as having "elaborated a program of common demands for the workers of the mining, metallurgical and mechanical industries of these countries."<sup>28</sup> Here, too, there is little indication of the subsequent functioning of a Latin America wide organization.

Finally, at the Fourth Congress of CTAL in Santiago, Chile in March 1953, there was a series of informal meetings of delegates of unions of various trades and industries. "For example, waiters and hotel workers of four countries discussed common problems." Similar meetings were held by textile workers, peasants, and the mining and metallurgical workers' unions "carried out a 'small Congress,' in which they exchanged experiences and informed each other in detail of the recent conference of Miners and Metallurgical Workers that met in Mexico."<sup>29</sup> There is no indication of any serious follow up resulting from these informal meetings.

## **CTAL AND THE WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

We have noted that Lombardo Toledano and other CTAL leaders were enthusiastic about a world labor conference that the British Trades Union

Congress called to meet in London as World War II was drawing to a close, and pledged that CTAL and its affiliates would participate in it. This was the preliminary meeting that paved the way for the founding of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), established at a congress in Paris in September 1945.

CTAL did participate in the London meeting. Two Latin Americans, Lombardo Toledano and Angel Cofiño of Cuba, were named to the Continuation Committee set up there to plan for the founding meeting of the WFTU.

Shortly after the London meeting, I noted that "Lombardo Toledano made a considerable impression. The writer was in Britain at the time, and remembers the way in which the British newspaper correspondents seemed quite enthralled by the gentleman's powers of oratory—though one may be pardoned for suspecting that they did not know what he was saying. He succeeded in giving a considerable impression of his own and his organization's importance."<sup>30</sup>

CTAL was also well represented at the founding congress of the WFTU in Paris. Lombardo Toledano was both one of the three delegates there for the CTM, and an observer from CTAL.<sup>31</sup> He served on the Constitution Subcommittee, and at the end of the meeting was elected vice president of the WFTU "for Latin American Affairs."<sup>32</sup>

I noted after the Paris meeting that

[i]n the business of the Conference, the Latin American delegates consistently took the side of the Soviet and the CIO delegations rather than that of the British Trade Union Congress. Thus Lombardo Toledano nominated Louis Saillant of the French CGT for Secretary of the World Federation against Walter Schevenels, the delegate favored by the British. . . . He agreed with Walter Citrine of the British TUC that the WFTU shouldn't be political, but he said '[i]t is unquestionable that the Workers International should have a clear program. We do not ask [for] a political confederation of trade unions, but if the confederation is to be powerful it must be young and enthusiastic.'

The Latin American delegation introduced a number of resolutions that were well received and that were approved by the conference. Four of these were introduced at the same time: that all countries break off relations with the Franco regime in Spain, that the same be done in the case of Argentina, that the Spanish Republican Government-in-Exile in Mexico be recognized, and finally, that Puerto Rico be given a chance to decide on the question of independence.<sup>33</sup>

Robert Millon noted that "Lombardo has continued as a vice president of the WFTU. . . . He attends all major congresses of the organization."<sup>34</sup>

When the split occurred in the World Federation of Trade Unions in 1949 that resulted in the establishment of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, leaving the WFTU predominantly an organization of

Communist-dominated national trade union groups, CTAL remained with the WFTU. The January-February 1949 meeting of the Executive Bureau of the WFTU passed a long resolution, the principal operative segments of which were: "(1) To consider the Confederation of Workers of Latin America (C.T.L.A.) as the body linking and coordinating the World Federation of Trade Unions and the National Centres of Latin America. (2) To instruct the General Secretary of the W.F.T.U. to make an immediate study of the establishment of a permanent link with the Bureau of the C.T.A.L. with the aim of bringing about the effective cooperation of the W.F.T.U. in the study of the problems of the working class of Latin America and of its demands in agreement with its representative bodies."<sup>35</sup>

The link of the WFTU with the Bureau of the C.T.A.L. took the form of establishing "a bureau of Spanish-language publications under Lombardo's chairmanship." Lombardo Toledano became the "editor-president" of the Spanish-language edition of the WFTU's regular monthly magazine, which was published in Mexico, *El Movimiento Sindical Mundial*.<sup>36</sup>

In October 1960, Vicente Lombardo Toledano tendered his resignation, both as president of CTAL and vice president of the WFTU. However, his resignations were turned down in both cases, and he continued in those posts.<sup>37</sup>

## THE CTAL 1953 CONGRESS

The Fourth Ordinary Congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina met in Santiago, Chile in March 1953. It was reported more or less officially that there were 209 delegates from 12 Latin American countries. Of these, 96 were "direct delegates designated by organisms affiliated with the CTAL and FSM" (WFTU). In addition, there were 10 observers and 103 fraternal delegates. The direct delegates came from organizations in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. There were fraternal delegates from Brazil and observers from Bolivia and Brazil.

Chile had the largest representation at the Congress, 55. However, these direct delegates did not come from the recently formed Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile (CUTCh), which at its founding convention had agreed not to join any international labor organization. Rather, they were named by individual federations that belonged to the CUTCh.

During the congress there were 7 plenary sessions, 12 meetings of congress committees discussing particular subjects, and 9 "encounters." These last were more or less informal meetings of worker-delegates from particular trades and industries.<sup>38</sup>

The official delegate count was misleading in terms of reflecting the real strength of CTAL in a number of countries. In the case of Argentina, for instance, there were fourteen direct delegates who were credited, but these represented Communist groups working within the Argentine labor

movement, since the vast majority of the organized workers of Argentina belonged to the *Confederación General del Trabajo*, which was controlled by followers of President Juan Perón, who had their own Latin American trade union organization. The other dissident group in Argentine organized labor, the *Comité Obrero Argentino de Sindicatos Independientes* (COASI), controlled by Socialists, was affiliated with ORIT.

In the case of Brazil, which was credited with 4 direct delegates, as well as 5 observers, and 16 fraternal delegates, all of these must also have come from Communist groups working within the Brazilian unions. At that point, the Brazilian unions were under extensive control of the government, which had just allowed the industry-wide union groups (there was no recognized central labor group) to join international organizations, and those that had chosen to do so had joined ORIT and the ICFTU.

In the cases of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia* and the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba*, both of which were reported as being represented at the Santiago Congress, there had been major splits, with the majority factions being controlled by anti-Communist parties (the *Partido Liberal* and *Partido Auténtico*, respectively). In both cases, the majority segment had joined ORIT and ICFTU, as the minority factions that were represented in Santiago.

In Peru and Venezuela, there were then military dictatorships in power that had largely suppressed the trade union movement. In both cases, Communist influence in organized labor had been a relatively small minority, and the exiled leaders of the majority labor confederations were working with ORIT and ICFTU. The most conspicuous Venezuelan delegate was Rodolfo Quintero, head of a small Communist-led federation in Caracas, which was tolerated, if not encouraged, by the dictatorship.<sup>39</sup>

In Uruguay, the *Unión General de Trabajadores* had lost much of its following after falling completely under Communist control. At the time of the Santiago CTAL Congress, there was in process a move to unify the majority of the labor movement into a new organization that for the next decade would contain the majority of Uruguay organized labor and be affiliated with ORIT and ICFTU.

The one case that did represent a newly organized and substantial labor movement that was under Communist control was Guatemala. The leader of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Guatemala*, Víctor Manuel Gutiérrez, played a conspicuous role in the Santiago Congress.

Finally, the CTM had withdrawn from CTAL. It still was by far the largest segment of the Mexican labor movement. The delegates to the CTAL Fourth Congress came from an organization that had been established under Vicente Lombardo Toledano after he was expelled by the CTM. This was the UGOCM, which had been founded in 1949.<sup>40</sup>

Vicente Lombardo Toledano had sent an invitation to José Espejo, the secretary-general of the Peronista Latin American labor organization, *Agrupación de Trabajadores Latinoamericanos Sindicalistas* (ATLAS),

to participate in the Santiago meeting, which "will serve to provide the Latin American labor movement a platform for common struggle for its demands." Lombardo had added, "In inviting to this meeting the organization that you lead, we want to emphasize that your presence will not represent any connection, only an approach and exchange of opinions that doubtless can be very useful in promoting the unity of action that is so urgent for all the workers of America for the defense of their rights and their interests."<sup>41</sup> Espejo had apparently ignored the invitation.

Two speeches delivered during the congress set the tone of the meeting. These were the greetings delivered at the opening session by Henri Jourdain, a secretary of the World Federation of Trade Unions, and the discourse given by Vicente Lombardo Toledano at the closing meeting of the congress held in the Plaza Bulnes in the center of Santiago. Both argued that CTAL and WFTU were the only organizations within the world labor movement working for unity of that movement. All others were "divisionists" and/or "tools of the imperialists." Both speakers noted their organizations' struggles to improve workers' conditions of life and labor, and insisted that only they were dedicated to splitting organized labor and serving the interests of the "imperialists."

Henri Jourdain, perhaps unwittingly, most clearly underlined what really separated the WFTU—and CTAL—from other currents within the world labor movement. He said that

the WFTU counts within its ranks the great unions of the countries with 800 million men and women who find themselves in our days in the forefront of progressive humanity: the unions of the countries where capitalist exploitation of man by man has totally disappeared, or is on the way to disappearance; the countries where the working class exercises, in the name of the entire society the totality of power, or exercises a determining place in the exercise of power; the unions of the countries where crises and their causes, unemployment and misery have completely disappeared, giving way to free and continuous economic development and the constant improvement of material and cultural welfare of the population; the most powerful unions of the world; those of the Soviet Union, the country of triumphant socialism, the country where the manual and intellectual workers now dedicate their common energies and ingenuity to the pacific development of communism. . . . From this one deduces the truly democratic and worldwide character of the WFTU—which only it possesses.<sup>42</sup>

Lombardo Toledano in his final speech emphasized who and where the major opponent of the "democratic and worldwide" forces of the WFTU and CTAL were to be found. He said, "Before, our struggle against North American imperialism has been local, provincial; but today that imperialism has been converted into the enemy of all free peoples and menaces humanity with provoking a new war, the struggle against this enemy has become the common one of all the peoples of the earth. . . . And it is for our political, economic and cultural reasons that we have to continue



struggling against Yankee imperialism. It is the working class that must go in the vanguard and that honors itself in this struggle. Only those peoples are worthy of living who aspire for their freedom."<sup>43</sup>

In spite of assertions throughout the meetings of the Fourth Congress of CTAL that it represented the unity of the Latin American labor movement, the overwhelming majority of which was represented in the confederación, two other things were in fact made clear by that meeting: its decline from the time when, in fact, it had included within its ranks the great majority of Latin American organized labor; and the fact that it had been converted (as much as the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana [CSLA] had once been) into an integral part of the world Communist movement.

### CPUSTAL, CTAL'S SUCCESSOR

By the early 1960s, the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina had become, as Greenfield and Maram noted, "a shadow organization."<sup>44</sup> By 1960, "the CTAL had active affiliates in the French West Indies and in five countries of Latin America, Mexico, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Chile and Uruguay, with a claimed total membership of about 100,000."<sup>45</sup>

From the point of view of the Latin American Communist parties and their supporters in Moscow, the time had come finally to declare CTAL out of existence and to create in its place a new Latin American trade union confederation. The initiative for establishing such an organization came particularly from two sources. One of these was the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba which, through the means of a massive purge, had in effect been taken over by the government of Premier Fidel Castro, and been converted into a Stalin-model trade union organization completely dominated by the Partido Unificado de la Revolución Socialista (PURS), which in 1965 became the Communist Party of Cuba. The other was the Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile (CUTCh), which was controlled by the Communist Party of Chile, in conjunction with allies from the Socialist Party.

The Castro regime had sought quite early to bring into existence a new Latin American trade union confederation. Its first effort was an agreement of the CTC with the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV) to work together toward that end. However, as the Communist nature of the Castro regime and its subordination of the Cuban labor movement became clear, the CTV withdrew from the effort.

Meanwhile, among the decisions regarding Latin America that were taken by the Conference of 81 Communist parties that met in Moscow in November 1960 was one to organize a congress to form a new Latin American trade union confederation in September 1961. As it turned out, the date for such a meeting had to be postponed twice.<sup>46</sup>

The lead was finally taken by CUTCh. It sent out invitations to a conference in the Chilean capital in September 1962. The tone of the proposed meeting was indicated by the invitation issued by CUTCh. It proclaimed that "only the heroic Cuban people is constructing a regime of justice," and added that, "the Cuban Revolution must enjoy our support, admiration and solidarity, since it has nationalized all the factories, mines, banks, public services and other enterprises, undertaking the construction of socialism and overcoming the most profound crisis."<sup>47</sup>

This invitation provoked a reply from 17 labor leaders of unions belonging to ORIT who, meeting in Berlin in July 1961, adopted the following resolution: "To condemn the attitude of the trade union organizations that patronize or lend support to fomenting or intensifying the division of the workers in the American continent, cooperating, assisting or fomenting totalitarian proposals of the so-called 'Trade Union Conference,' converting themselves into instruments of Communist strategy."<sup>48</sup>

The Santiago conference had the strong support of Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who participated in it, and delivered one of the principal addresses there. According to his biographer Robert Millon, "Lombardo briefly outlined the history of the Latin-American labor movement since the end of World War II and hailed the attempt to create a new confederation of Latin-American workers. Unity of Latin-American labor through such a new organization, stated Lombardo, is indispensable to the complete success of the second general Latin-American revolution: the revolution for the economic liberation of the Latin-American People from imperialism."

Millon continued, "Lombardo pointed out that fighting organizations of the working class are formed in certain historical periods in order to serve the immediate needs of the working class in the long-term struggle to eliminate the exploitation of man by man. Such organizations are not intended to exist perpetually. The CTAL, created in 1938, served a useful function. Now a new and larger organization is needed. On the day that such a new Latin-American labor confederation is created, said Lombardo, 'I will present myself before the conference to declare that the Confederation of Latin American Workers has died because it has given life to a new powerful organism of the proletariat and the peasants of our Hemisphere.'"<sup>49</sup>

The Santiago conference adopted a number of decisions. These included "a minimum program of action for all Latin-American union of workers," "to reiterate support for Cuba," and "[t]o issue a manifesto to the Latin American working class explaining the present Latin American panorama and calling for common action." However, the most important decision was to call another conference in September 1963 to establish a new Latin American confederation of labor.<sup>50</sup>

The second conference met in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, in January 1964, and established the Congreso Permanente de Unidad Sindical de los



Trabajadores de América Latina (CPUSTAL). Its headquarters was established in Santiago, Chile.<sup>51</sup> With its formal establishment, CTAL officially went out of existence.<sup>52</sup>

Dunkerly and Whitehouse, writing in 1980, commented with regard to the CPUSTAL:

Its reliance upon Soviet backing has meant that its influence largely depends on the strength of the local Communist parties and its work has followed their policies. Hence, CPUSTAL has had to contend with the CP's belief in the existence of a broad anti-imperialist and democratic sector of the Latin American capitalist class which has weakened its capacity to provide adequate leadership in the fight against dictatorship. The result has been that the CPs in Latin America, which are in any case small and of limited political significance in most countries, have failed to grow and this is mirrored in CPUSTAL itself. Moreover, CPUSTAL is attacked from right and left alike for the suppression of independent workers' organizations in Cuba.<sup>53</sup>

The CPUSTAL also suffered from the vagaries of Latin American politics. Thus, a second meeting that it planned for Montevideo, Uruguay, could not be held because the government of that country forbade it to meet there. Then, after the fall of the Allende government, and the suppression of the Chilean labor movement, the CPUSTAL had to move its headquarters to Mexico.<sup>54</sup> After the reestablishment of a free labor movement in Chile, the revived CUTCh did not rejoin the CPUSTAL.

## CONCLUSION

The Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina was the one organization of Latin American organized labor that, for a short while, had within its ranks most of the trade unions of Latin America. However, within half a dozen years, due to the growth of several national central labor groups under Communist control, the withdrawal of one of its major affiliates, the Confederación General del Trabajo of Argentina, and the split of several others into Communist-controlled organizations and those controlled by other political groups that also withdrew from CTAL, the confederación came to be almost completely an organization of Communist-dominated trade unions.

This evolution resulted in a drastic decline in the size and influence of CTAL. By 1963–1964 this became so obvious that, with the help of the newly communized labor movement of Cuba, steps were taken to supplant CTAL with a new organization, CPUSTAL. This movement was even welcomed by the perpetual president of CTAL, Vicente Lombardo Toledano who, upon the establishment of the CPUSTAL, declared CTAL out of existence. The CPUSTAL itself was destined to have a somewhat shadowy existence.

## NOTES

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## CHAPTER 6

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# The Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores

The establishment in January 1948 of the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores (CIT—Inter-American Confederation of Workers) as a rival of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina was the result of developments within both the trade union movement of the United States and those of Latin America during the last part of World War II and the immediate postwar years. The short history of CIT was the consequence of major changes in the global labor movement.

### TEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION OF THE AFL

The most significant national trade union organization that refused to take part in the formation of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) was the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The reason for the AFL's failure to participate in the WFTU was their reluctance to be associated with the labor movement of the Soviet Union, which the AFL leaders maintained was not in fact a movement of the workers, but an instrument of the Soviet Communist Party and government to control the laboring masses of the USSR. In contrast, the other major U.S. labor group, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), fully participated in the negotiations and congresses that resulted in the formation of the WFTU.

The refusal of the American Federation of Labor to join the WFTU and the harshness of its criticisms of the World Federation of Trade Unions resulted for the time being in its isolation within the world labor movement. With the estrangement of its relations with organized labor in most

of Europe and in such Asian and African countries as had trade union movements, the AFL's leaders turned their attention to the Latin American labor movements, with which they had very little contact for many years.

The first decision the AFL leaders made was that they would not make any attempt to revive the Pan American Federation of Labor (PAFL). They judged correctly that it had been so discredited that such an effort would have no chance of success. Rather, they would seek to bring in existence an entirely new inter-American trade union organization.

One of the first steps in seeking to reestablish relations with organized labor in Latin American countries was the appointment of Serafino Romualdi as the Latin American secretary of the AFL. Romualdi was the editor of the Italian-language version of the newspaper of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. He was a onetime Socialist youth leader who had fled from fascist Italy during the 1920s. During World War II he had been in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the wartime predecessor of the CIA, first working with antifascists in Italy, and then operating in South America, where he worked with antifascists among the Italian immigrants (and their offspring) in several countries where there had been a substantial influx of Italians. In the latter work, he had developed considerable knowledge of the local organized labor movement, as well as developing acquaintanceships with a number of union leaders.

The more or less immediate objective of Romualdi was to sound out the possibility of organizing an alternative to CTAL as the hemispheric labor confederation. He had certain financial help for this from the Labor Division of the Office of Inter-American Affairs that President Franklin Roosevelt had established during the War, under the direction of Nelson Rockefeller. The chief of that division was John Herling, a onetime official of the League for Industrial Democracy, which was headed by the Socialist leader Norman Thomas.

Romualdi and Herling for some reason decided that the first exploration of the general state of the Latin American labor movement would best be carried out without identifying the AFL's association with the matter. So an extensive trip was planned for Samuel Guy Inman, a onetime Protestant missionary in Latin America and in 1945 one of the senior Latin Americanist scholars in the United States. Inman would make the trip under the supposed sponsorship of the Inter-American Labor Union Project, ostensibly organized by Survey Associates, publishers of the *Survey Graphic* magazine, a liberal New York periodical. The project was to arrange for "bringing members of Latin American labor unions to this country to see employer-employee relationship for themselves, and to study union practices here."

The real purpose of this project (at least in the minds of Serafino Romualdi and John Herling) was to sound out labor leaders in the various countries Inman would visit as to their willingness to have their union groups help form a new hemispheric confederation to supplant CTAL.

However, the fact that Inman did not understand this purpose was demonstrated by his choosing as one of the first labor leaders to be visited Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the head of CTAL. That visit soon brought an early end to Inman's mission.<sup>1</sup>

## CHANGES IN LATIN AMERICAN UNIONISM

When Serafino Romualdi finally undertook personally the task of discovering which Latin American union groups might be willing to participate in establishing an alternative to CTAL, he was quite quickly able to bring together a significant number of such organizations. This was because by 1946–1947, important changes had occurred in the Latin American labor scene.

For one thing, a few union groups of some importance had appeared. Two of these, the Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia and the Confederación Rerum Novarum of Costa Rica, were under Roman Catholic leadership, but were not confessional and were willing to join forces with unions in other countries that were not Catholic-oriented. A third group, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela, was established in 1947 under the leadership of the Acción Democrática Party, of strong anti-Communist inclination.

In other cases, affiliates of the CTAL had split in the immediate postwar period, and factions had emerged that were opposed to the Communist leadership of CTAL. This was the situation in Peru, where the Aprista Party had, in 1945, taken the leadership of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú away from the Communists and had withdrawn from the CTAL, leaving only a small minority labor group still affiliated with Lombardo Toledano's organization. In Chile, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile had also split, and although the Communist-dominated faction was the stronger of the two, the other group, led by the Socialist Party, was still an organization of significance. The Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba had also split in 1947, with the faction controlled by the anti-Communist Auténtico Party having by far the larger membership and greater influence, with the backing of the government of President Ramón Grau San Martín.

Finally, there was a scattering of other union groups that were willing to join a new hemispheric trade union confederation. These included some of the largely government dominated confederations in Brazil, the small Confederación Proletaria in Mexico, and some small individual unions in Ecuador.

Romualdi knew enough about Latin American labor movements to know that the U.S. model of a labor movement that had little or no connection with a political party was not customary—or acceptable—in Latin America. He consequently made part of his task the establishment of personal and political relations with leaders of political parties that had strong influence in the labor movements of various countries. These included

José Figueres of the Costa Rican Partido Social Democrática, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre of the Peruvian Aprista Party, and Rómulo Betancourt of Acción Democrática of Venezuela.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CONFEDERACIÓN INTERAMERICANA DE TRABAJADORES

The task of putting together an alternative to CTAL finally bore fruit in January 1948, with the founding congress of the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores (CIT). Unlike CTAL, it was an organization that had both Latin American and North American affiliates. The American Federation of Labor and its Canadian counterpart, the Trades and Labor Congress were part of CIT, as well as its Latin American affiliates and one organization from the colonial West Indies.

There were officially recorded some 132 delegates in attendance at the founding congress of the CIT in Lima, of whom 32 represented the Socialist faction of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile, and 68 the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú. Other union groups represented were the Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia, the Confederación Rerum Novarum of Costa Rica, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela, the Federación Libre de Trabajadores de Puerto Rico, the Confederación Proletaria Nacional of Mexico, three of the sectoral labor confederations of Brazil, and local union groups in Bolivia and El Salvador.<sup>2</sup>

One delegate whose arrival was quite unexpected was L. E. Eleazer, the head of the Surinam Miners Union and Surinam Workers Union. His organization had not been formally invited to send a representative to the meeting, but had received a notice that it was going to be held, and feeling sympathy for the objectives of the congress had sent Eleazer to represent them. In fact, he became one of the stars of the meeting, and was elected a vice president of CIT—perhaps because he was the only representative of a union group in a colonial country.

Of course, the fundamental tasks of the Lima meeting were to declare the existence of a new hemispheric trade union confederation, to draw up its basic documents, and to elect its first leadership. In addition, it ratified a number of resolutions, issued a "Message of the CIT to the Peoples of the Americas," and adopted a report of its Committee of Analysis of the International Labor Movement.

The preamble of the statutes of the new confederation stated that CIT's purposes were "to unify and coordinate the trade union thought and action in the Western Hemisphere, to establish an organism charged with structuring and organizing the trade union forces of the New World—to avoid tension among the workers of democratic tendency, to contribute to world peace and to protect and enlarge the rights and benefits of the workers, inspired by democratic principles."<sup>3</sup>

The Declaration of Principles adopted at the Lima Congress denounced discrimination based on politics, religion, nationality, sex, race, or age, and condemned "the exploitation of man by man, and said that the trade union struggle was a class struggle that would be pursued by a democratic labor movement independent of the State and that refuses all collaboration with totalitarianism." It also said that the establishment of CIT was the first step in uniting the international free trade union movement.

The statutes of CIT provided for an executive committee of the new confederation, made up of a president, 10 vice presidents and 4 secretaries, which should meet at least twice a year, and outline the functions of the president and the 4 secretaries, who were the only officials of CIT to receive a salary.<sup>4</sup>

A "Program of Action" was adopted by the meeting. It pledged CIT to "struggle against all forms of imperialism in the economic or political fields and will defend the democratic regimes in the countries of the continent. It reiterated the determination to struggle for trade union liberties. Finally, it proclaimed the need to formulate a program of specific and concrete actions around the following subjects: "1. economic problems of the American continent; 2. labor problems, of the agricultural worker and indigenous peoples; 3. the question of social security; 4. the problems of illiteracy, of workers' education and cultures; 5. the struggle for peace."<sup>5</sup>

Bernardo Ibáñez, the secretary-general of the Chilean confederation, was chosen as president of CIT. The four secretaries who were chosen were Isidoro Godoy, also of the Chilean CUTCh as secretary of the presidency; Arturo Jáuregui of the Peruvian CTP as administrative and financial secretary; Serafino Romualdi of the AFL as secretary of external affairs; and Eusebio Mujal of the Cuban CTC as secretary of the organization. The nine vice presidents were Arturo Sabroso of Peru, George Meany of the United States, B. J. Jewell of the United States and Canada, Luis Alberto Monge of Costa Rica, Enrique Rangel of Mexico, C. Cabral do Mello of Brazil, Francisco Aguirre of Cuba, Juan Lara of Colombia, and L. E. Eleazer of Surinam. A place also was reserved for a representative of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela.<sup>6</sup>

The only serious controversy of the meeting concerned the labor movement of Argentina. Although not invited to the congress, the Confederación General del Trabajo of Argentina, which by then was controlled by the government of General Juan Perón, sought admission to the Lima meeting and the CIT. In this it was supported by a delegate from the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana, the onetime partner of the American Federation of Labor in the Pan American Federation of Labor. However, the AFL representatives strongly opposed the seating of the CGT, arguing that it had become a mere tool of the Perón dictatorship. The AFL's position had the backing of most of the Latin American delegates, and the CGT was not accepted as a member of the new Inter-American Confederation of Labor. The Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) decided that it



would also not join CIT,<sup>7</sup> and subsequently helped organized a Peronista hemispheric labor group.

## THE HISTORY OF CIT

The new Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores was almost immediately faced with a crisis. The founding congress had voted to establish its headquarters in Lima, Peru. However, the government of President José Bustamante decreed that it would not allow that to happen.<sup>8</sup>

The problem was that the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú, which had been the host to the founding congress of CIT, was controlled by the Aprista Party, which, although it had been largely responsible for President Bustamante's election in 1945, was no longer on friendly terms with his regime in January 1948. The ban on CIT being based in Peru was part of the quarrel between the president and the Aprista Party.

In the face of this situation, it was decided to establish the headquarters of CIT in Santiago, Chile. Of course, the president of CIT was Bernardo Ibáñez, the secretary-general of the Socialist faction of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile which, together with the Peruvian CTP, had issued the invitations to the founding congress of CIT.

In October 1948, President Bustamante outlawed the Aprista Party, and ordered the arrest of leading figures in the CTP. A few weeks later, a military coup overthrew President Bustamante and brought to power General Manuel Odría who, for several years, made free trade unionism all but impossible in Peru. As a result of these events, CIT mobilized a campaign throughout the hemisphere against the suppression of its Peruvian affiliate and the persecution of its leaders.<sup>9</sup>

A few weeks after the Odría coup in Peru, the military also seized power in Venezuela. One of the first victims of this coup was the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela, also a CIT affiliate, and CIT organized strong protests against the actions of the new Venezuelan military regime.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of these setbacks, the CIT leaders sought to gain new affiliates. In the case of Argentina, the COASI became a member of CIT. It was a small group principally under Socialist leadership that was trying to provide opposition to the Confederación General del Trabajo, which was under Perón government control.

In the case of Paraguay, although CIT did not gain a new affiliate, it did have contact with the Organización Republicana Obrera, a group organized as an organ of the governing Colorado Party, and sought to encourage its tendency to become a real trade union organization.<sup>11</sup>

In one case, Bolivia, CIT fostered the establishment of an affiliate that was subsequently to become an embarrassment to both CIT and its successor, the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT). The labor movement in that country was largely under the control of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), a party roughly equivalent

to the Peruvian Aprista Party. However, the CIT leadership accepted a widely based description of the MNR as being totalitarian. It also accepted the government then in power, that of President Enrique Hertzog, which in fact was controlled by the foreign mining firms and traditional landlord oligarchy, as being "popular and constitutionalist."

With the acquiescence of the Hertzog government, CIT supported the efforts to form an anti-MNR trade union group. The result was the establishment of the Confederación Boliviana de Trabajadores (CBT), which affiliated with CIT. In fact, a branch office of CIT was set up in La Paz.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently, the MNR came to power in the National Revolution of 1952, and it carried out one of the most fundamental social revolutions of Latin America in the 20th century. During the MNR period in power, the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), which it controlled, was established as the overwhelmingly predominant Bolivian central labor body. However, largely because of the experience of the MNR labor leaders with CIT, COB, which at the end of the 20th century still remained the country's central labor body, refused to join ORIT, CIT's successor. The ill-fated CBT merged into the Central Obrera Boliviana soon after that organization was established.

CIT, in pursuance of its objective of superseding CTAL as the principal spokesman for the hemispheric labor movement, enjoyed success in the International Labor Organization (ILO), the United Nations organization in the labor-management field. The Council of Administration of the ILO agreed to recognize CIT as a "nongovernmental organization of a consultative character," on the same footing as the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions.<sup>13</sup> It also received "consultative status" with the Pan American Union's Social and Economic Council.<sup>14</sup>

During its short existence, CIT engaged in a number of different activities. For instance, President Ibáñez, Vice Presidents Luis Alberto Monge and Leo Eleazer, as well as Secretaries Eusebio Mujal, Arturo Jáuregui, and Serafino Romualdi visited a number of countries, establishing closer contacts with CIT affiliates and contacting other labor groups that might become part of the confederación. Pursuant to a resolution of the Lima Congress, a CIT committee consisting of Vice Presidents Juan Lara and Luis Alberto Monge, the Panamanian labor leader Luis Alejandro Cuellar, and Secretary Romualdi, together with representatives of the American Federation of Labor, officially investigated labor conditions in the Panama Canal Zone, with the objective of eliminating long standing racial and other types of discrimination against workers there. The CIT also sponsored a meeting of representatives of the AFL union of agricultural workers with counterparts in Mexico, with the objective of establishing fraternal relations and cooperation between the two groups.<sup>15</sup>

What was called the First General Congress of CIT was held in Havana, Cuba in September 1951. It was greeted with violent denunciation by the Havana Communist daily *Hoy*. That paper claimed that CIT was

"a tentacle that the Department of State of Washington tries to impose upon the proletariat of Latin America to assure its division and tie it to the car of imperialist exploitation." Also, *Hoy* repeated a claim that CIT was "an heir" of the Pan American Federation of Labor, and predicted that it would fail, as had the PAFL.<sup>16</sup>

There were 142 delegates from 47 different labor organizations in 24 countries, as well as 3 fraternal delegates at the Havana Congress. The chief U.S. delegate reported later that "in number of delegates and countries represented, the Havana convention surpassed the most optimistic expectations and topped the number of countries and delegates that were at the Lima conference."<sup>17</sup> However, it is important to note that Luis Morones of the Mexican Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana was denied credentials for the Congress.<sup>18</sup>

One important advance for CIT shown at the Havana Congress was the presence of a number of leaders of trade unions in the colonial countries of the Caribbean. The only such unions that had been represented at the Lima Congress were those of Dutch Guiana (Surinam). However, in Havana there were also delegates from important unions in Jamaica, St. Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana (Guyana).<sup>19</sup>

The Havana meeting had an extensive agenda. This consisted of eight points: 1. Report of the President of the Confederación; 2. CIT's point of view on industrialization of the countries of Latin America; 3. CIT and the new World Labor International; 4. Problems of the Peasantry and its trade union organization in America; 5. Study of the application of the Conventions of the International Labor Organization in Latin America. 6. Modifications that may be suggested in the structure and statutes of CIT. 7. Program of Work of the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores; and 8. Election of the new Executive Committee of CIT.<sup>20</sup>

In preparation for discussion of the program of work of CIT, the third meeting of the Executive Council in Montevideo in April 1949 had drawn up a draft. It dealt with the economic problems of the hemisphere, with particular emphasis on development and industrialization, social security problems; agrarian, peasant and indigenous peoples' problems; reforms of education; trade union rights and democracy, and "The Problems of the Struggle for Peace." This last item proclaimed that CIT "declares its decided support for the free and democratic workers of the countries in which there exist totalitarian government of Eastern Europe, Spain and other regions in their struggle for liberation."<sup>21</sup>

There was strong protest during the congress against the dictatorships—including those of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, Somoza in Nicaragua, Odría in Peru, and the military regime in Venezuela. There were also strong criticisms, particularly from the Cuban delegation, of the failure of the U.S. government to oppose those regimes.<sup>22</sup>

Important decisions were taken with regard to the administration and physical location of the headquarters of the CIT. The post of secretary-general of the organization was created to be in charge of the day-to-day

activities of the confederation, and it was decided to move the headquarters from Santiago, Chile, to Havana, Cuba. Francisco Aguirre, the head of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Federation and a leading figure in the leadership of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, was elected as the first secretary-general. Also, "[t]he President, whose administrative tasks have now been transferred to the secretary-general, is no longer required to reside in the city of the C.I.T. headquarters."<sup>23</sup>

Of most significance for the future of the Interamerican Confederation of Workers was the discussion and decision of the Havana Congress with regard to "The CIT and the New World Labor International." President Ibáñez had devoted attention in his report to the congress to the split that had taken place in the World Federation of Trade Unions early in 1949, between the union groups under Communist control, which remained in the WFTU, and the non-Communist union groups, led by the British Trades Union Congress and the Dutch trade union movement, as well as the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the United States, which announced their withdrawal from the World Federation.<sup>24</sup>

The CIT president also appended to the published version of his speech a document that the secretariat of CIT had issued at the time of the beginning of the WFTU split in January 1949. After welcoming that split, the CIT leaders had said: "The CIT thinks that the moment has arrived to begin the preliminary work of organization of a new World Confederation of Labor. We are disposed to cooperate with all of the unions of good will in the preparation for the necessary moves to bring this about."<sup>25</sup>

In conformity with their desire to become part of a new world labor confederation in which the Communists had no part, delegates to the Havana congress passed a resolution that declared:

1. Approval of the declaration of aims adopted by the preparatory international trade union committee at its meeting in London, July 25 through 29, 1949. 2. Affiliation of all member organizations of the C.I.T. with the proposed new international federation of free trade unions. 3. Large participation of C.I.T. affiliates at the London conference of November 28 where the new international trade union federation will be organized; 4. Adoption by the London Conference of a resolution recognizing the C.I.T. as its regional organization in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>26</sup>

Subsequently, the first three parts of this resolution of the Havana Congress were put into effect. However, it proved impossible for CIT to become more or less automatically the American regional grouping of the new ICFTU. Important Latin American union groups, such as the Confederación de Trabajadores de México and the Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia, as well as the CIO of the United States, which had been part of the WFTU until its split, were not willing merely to join CIT. Rather, it became necessary to establish a new regional confederation for the Americas, consisting of CIT member groups and unions formerly part of the WFTU and the CTAL. This gave rise to ORIT.

With the establishment of ORIT in January 1951, CIT officially went out of existence. After adjournment of the ORIT founding congress, the General Council of CIT met, and pursuant to authorization of the Second Congress of CIT to so act if a regional organization of the ICFTU was established, "agreed to dissolve the Inter-American Confederation of Workers, and recommended to the affiliated organizations unreserved cooperation with the newly established ORIT."

A number of speakers then spoke about the accomplishments of CIT: "all gave impressive testimony to the good work done by the C.I.T. and expressed the hope that its experiences may serve the O.R.I.T. to do an even better job," according to George Meany.<sup>27</sup>

## NOTES

1. See Samuel Guy Inman, "Inter-American Labor Union Project, Report of Activities of the Director, Samuel Guy Inman," (New York: Survey Associates Inc., May 18, 1946 (mimeographed) for Inman's version of this incident; I saw the other side as an assistant to John Herling.

2. Pedro Reiser, *L'Organisation Régionale Interaméricaine des Travailleurs (ORIT) de la Confédération Internationale des Syndicats Libres (C.I.S.L.) de 1951 à 1961* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, Genève & Librairie Minard, 1962), p. 34.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

7. Serafino Romualdi, *Presidents and Peons: Recollections of a Labor Ambassador in Latin America* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967), p. 78.

8. "Americas Labor Body Barred From Peru," *New York Times*, January 29, 1948.

9. Bernardo Ibáñez, *Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores: Primer Congreso General, La Habana, Cuba, del 6 al 10 de Septiembre 1949: Informe del Presidente* (Santiago, Chile: Publicaciones C.I.T., Agosto 1949), pp. 7–11.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

14. Louis Stark, "U.S. Workers Urge Latin Industries," *New York Times*, September 10, 1949.

15. Serafino Romualdi, "Free Labor of the Americas at San Francisco," *American Federationist* 55, no. 7 (Washington, DC, July 1948): 24–26.

16. *Hoy*, Havana, Cuba, September 4, 1949.

17. Philip Delaney, "C.I.T.'s Second Convention: Labor of the Americas Meets in Cuba," *American Federationist* 56, no. 10 (October 1949): p. 31.

18. Louis Stark, "Unions At Havana Asked to Dam Reds," *New York Times*, September 8, 1949.

19. Romualdi, "Western Hemisphere Labor Leaders Unite Against Communists and Rightists," *New Leader* 42, no. 40 (October 1, 1949): p. 7.

20. *Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores: Programa de Labor* (Santiago, Chile: Publicaciones CIT, Julio de 1949), p. 8.

21. Ibid., p. 7.
22. Louis Stark, "Latin Labor Group Is Critical of U.S.," *New York Times*, September 11, 1949.
23. Delaney, "C.I.T.'s Second Convention," p. 31.
24. Ibáñez, *Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores*, pp. 14–16.
25. Ibid., p. 12.
26. Delaney, "C.I.T.'s Second Convention," p. 31.
27. George Meany, "Mexico City Conference," *American Federationist* 58, no. 2 (Washington, DC, February 1951): 10.

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## CHAPTER 7

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# The Early Decades of ORIT

The Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers—ORIT) was the longest-lived regional labor confederation in the Americas. Founded in 1951, it had not gone out of existence half a century later. It was also the most extensive such organization to be established and maintained in the hemisphere, including affiliates not only in the 20 Latin American republics and the United States and Canada, but also in the Caribbean colonies of Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands, most of which emerged as independent nations in the decades following World War II. ORIT was founded as, and remained, the American regional grouping of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

The history of ORIT was sometimes turbulent. Bringing together labor groups of sometimes differing ideologies, of different national allegiances and outlooks, there often emerged strong differences of opinion, especially with regard to what attitudes and actions ORIT should take to political developments involving the labor movements of particular countries.

Sometimes relations between the U.S. unions and those of Latin America within ORIT were difficult. One reason for this was that throughout much of its history, ORIT was financed to a very large degree by its U.S. and Canadian affiliates. The North American affiliates also represented a very large part of total ORIT membership. From time to time some of the Latin American union leaders in ORIT felt that this gave the North American union leaders too much power—which from time to time they were prone to use—to influence decisions. On occasion, resentment found



expression in moves to establish a purely Latin American organization in place of ORIT, none of which bore fruit.

Finally, as the largest and most influential of the regional labor groups of the Americas, ORIT was the constant butt of attacks by its Communist, Peronista, and Catholic-oriented rivals, as well as having to face attempts by one or another of its rivals to entice ORIT affiliates into their ranks. However, by its 50th birthday, it had most of the organized labor movement of the Western Hemisphere as its affiliates.

## BACKGROUND OF FORMATION OF ORIT

Several events led up to the establishment of ORIT. The most significant of these was the split in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) early in 1949, which soon led to the founding of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. This event led to the withdrawal of several important Western Hemisphere national central labor organizations from the WFTU, and their becoming more inclined to the establishment of a new inter-American labor body associated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The most important of these groups were the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) of the United States, the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), the Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia, and several labor groups in the then still colonial West Indies.

In the late 1940s, the CIO, which had had several important national unions under Communist Party control, expelled those unions from its ranks. At the same time, the CIO was one of three national labor groups that, along with those of Great Britain and the Netherlands, initiated the split in the WFTU and took the lead in establishing a rival international union confederation. These events also contributed to a rapprochement between the CIO and the AFL that resulted early in 1955 in the merger of the two into the AFL-CIO. One aspect of this rapprochement was mutual agreement on the need for a new inter-American labor confederation to which both would belong.

A split had developed in the CTM in 1948 over disagreements concerning the political policy that it should follow. This led to the expulsion of Vicente Lombardo Toledano from the CTM, which more or less automatically resulted in the CTM withdrawing from CTAL, headed by Lombardo Toledano. The CTM was consequently ready to accept the possibility of helping to found a new inter-American organization.

In Colombia, too, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia had undergone a split between unions more or less controlled by the Liberal Party and those under Communist Party control. The Liberal-oriented faction, which was the larger of the two, withdrew from both the WFTU and CTAL, and was ready to join both the ICFTU and any new regional confederation that it might sponsor.

With the withdrawal of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) from the WFTU, most of the union groups in the British West Indies, which had had more or less close relations with the British TUC, also decided to quit the WFTU. Although they had not belonged to CTAL, most of them were ready to join a new American regional labor grouping.

A second factor leading to establishment of ORIT was the early decision of the ICFTU to establish regional organizations of its affiliates in various parts of the world. In the years following this decision, such regional organizations were set up in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. ORIT was the American grouping resulting from this ICFTU decision.

Another important event leading to establishment of ORIT was the Second Congress of the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores (CIT), which met in Havana, Cuba in September 1949. Established in January 1948 by the AFL, its Canadian counterpart, a variety of Latin American central labor groups, and a handful of such groups from the Caribbean colonies, CIT decided in its Second Congress that, in view of the split in the WFTU and the prospect of the establishment of a new world union confederation, it would work with member unions in America of the new world group to establish a new hemispheric labor confederation. If that new confederation was founded, the CIT Congress decided, the CIT affiliates would join it, and CIT itself would disappear.

## FOUNDING CONGRESS OF ORIT

The Founding Congress of ORIT met in Mexico City in January 1951. Although it accomplished its objective of setting up a new inter-American labor confederation, it proved to be a more turbulent meeting than had been expected.

The Mexico City congress was officially called by the ICFTU, and it issued the invitations to participate to organizations in the various American countries. J. H. Oldenbroek, the secretary-general of the ICFTU, was present at the congress, and played an active part in its proceedings.

There were officially reported to be delegates from 29 organizations from 21 countries at the congress. The countries represented were Argentina, British Honduras, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Grenada, Mexico, British Guiana, Honduras, Panama, Peru, Puerto, Saint Lucia, Trinidad, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela.<sup>1</sup>

In the cases of Argentina, Peru, and Venezuela, the delegates represented underground/exile groups. The Chilean group was the Socialist faction of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile, which by 1951 was a small element in the national labor movement.

Delegates from several of the sectoral labor confederations of Brazil had been invited to the Mexico City conference. However, the government of President Dutra would not grant passports to the representatives of these groups, and so they were unable to attend.<sup>2</sup>

The first day was taken up largely with organizational matters. The opening session was called to order by Sir Vincent Tewson, secretary-general of the British TUC, in his capacity as representative of the Executive Board of the ICFTU. He was followed by a welcoming address by Mexican President Miguel Alemán, who was himself followed by J. H. Oldenbroek, secretary-general of the ICFTU, who gave the keynote speech. There were then short speeches by J. Díaz de León, representing the Mexican delegates, George Meany for the North Americans, Eusebio Mujal, secretary-general of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, Henry Middleton of the General Workers Union of British Honduras, and Bernardo Ibáñez, secretary-general of the Socialist faction of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile. This was followed by election of the permanent officers of the meeting, headed by the president, Fidel Velázquez, secretary-general of the CTM.

That afternoon, the working committees were elected, dealing with the by-laws and finances, economic and agrarian problems, and resolutions. The second and third days of the congress were largely devoted to sessions of those committees.<sup>3</sup>

These first days of the meeting proceeded without any obvious dissension. However, on the fourth day, Fidel Velázquez commenced the session by announcing that before taking up that day's business, he wanted to prevent his "irrevocable" resignation as the presiding officer of the congress. He added that, although an "irreversible resignation" was not subject to debate, he wanted to explain the reasons for his action.

Velázquez offered several explanations for the unhappiness that had provoked his resignation. It seems obvious that some of these were more important than the issue that was most discussed in this meeting of the congress.

Velázquez began his list of complaints by asserting that in the Directing Board of the congress, because of the attitudes and actions of its other members, he had been "converted into the category of a decorative figure, and that cannot be tolerated by anyone or any Trade Union Unit." Also, he claimed that "in a systematic manner" anything he proposed in the Directing Board had received "a peremptory negative, because there is no intention of taking into account either my voice as President of the Congress or my voice as representative of the majority organization in Mexico."

Furthermore, claimed Velázquez, both plenary and committee meetings of the congress and sessions of the Directing Board "show clearly the intention of establishing an organization that does not guarantee the interests of the Latin American workers."

Velázquez then turned to the reasons which, in retrospect, seem to have been the principal causes for his decision to resign from the presidency of the congress. He said that "there is clearly the purpose of putting in a certain country the headquarters of the organization, where we, and I personally think, that it is not going to be possible to do anything

important in benefit of the Mexican workers...and also it is intended to place in the direction of this organization, the same Committee as that in the CIT." At issue here were the proposals that were pending to establish the headquarters in Havana, and to name as its first secretary-general the Cuban trade union leader Francisco Aguirre, who was secretary-general of CIT.

However, it was two other relatively secondary issues raised by Velázquez that provoked strong debate, and in effect provoked something of a split in ORIT before it had even been formally established. These were whether the Argentine Confederación General del Trabajo should be accepted as an affiliate of ORIT, and whether Luis Morones, head of the Confederación Nacional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) and one-time leader of the Pan American Federation of Labor, had the right to speak in the ORIT congress.<sup>4</sup>

The Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) had unexpectedly received an invitation from the Mexican delegation to the Mexico City congress to send representatives, which it did. A three-member group headed by Isaías Santín, administrative secretary of the CGT, had gone to Mexico, after conferring at length with General Perón.<sup>5</sup> However, the Steering Committee of the conference had decided that the three fraternal delegates from Argentina could not be seated, since their organization had not been invited to participate by the ICFTU, the only body authorized to issue such invitations.<sup>6</sup>

Velázquez started this discussion by saying that he wanted to see whether "there is a firm and decided intention on the part of this Congress to have unity of the workers of the Continent without discrimination of any kind." He then said that the CTM had for long had relations with the Argentine CGT, and saw no reason why that organization should not participate in the congress. He rejected the claim that it was banned because it was now an organization controlled by the Perón government, and asked whether the Brazilian organizations that were accepted as affiliates were not even more government-controlled than the Argentine CGT.

Several people participated in the subsequent debate, including John Brophy and Jacob Potofsky of the CIO, Augusto Malavé Villalba of the Venezuelan CTV, Candido Gregorio of the dissident Argentine labor group of the COASI, ICFTU secretary-general Oldenbroek, and several Mexicans.

When Luis Morones asked for the floor as a fraternal delegate, to support the case for the CGT, objections were raised that he was not in fact a delegate but only an observer, and so had no right to the floor.<sup>7</sup> When a vote giving Morones the floor was taken, only the Mexican delegates voted in favor of it.<sup>8</sup>

On the fifth day of the Founding Congress of the ORIT a constitution for the new labor organization was adopted. However, before the final vote on this, Fidel Velázquez announced that the CTM was retiring from the

meeting, and was withdrawing from the ICFTU, with which it had just recently become affiliated. However, the delegation from the other Mexican central labor group participating in the meeting, the Confederación Proletaria Nacional (CPN), which had been a member of CIT, announced that the CPN was not withdrawing from ORIT.<sup>9</sup>

A considerable number of resolutions were adopted by the last session of the Founding Congress of ORIT. These included expressing support for the United Nations forces in Korea in "their struggle against Communist aggression," denouncing "totalitarian dictatorships" then existing in the Western Hemisphere and demanding "immediate holding of free elections and reestablishment of trade union rights in the countries that are at present ruled by military dictatorships." More specific resolutions denounced the Dominican Republic dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo for the kidnapping of Dominican labor leader Mauricio Báez, and supported the Colombian government in its controversy with the Peruvian dictator General Manuel Odría's refusal to give a safe conduct to the Peruvian political leader Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who had sought refuge in the Colombian Embassy in Lima.

One of the last acts of the Founding Congress was to elect the leaders of the new organization. The exiled Peruvian trade union leader Arturo Sabroso was chosen as president, and Cuban unionist Francisco Aguirre as secretary-general. A seven-person executive committee (plus an alternate for each) was also elected, which included unionists from Chile, Uruguay, the United States, Canada, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexican Manuel Rivera (of the CPN). A 31-member Regional Council was also chosen.

The closing session of the Congress was addressed by President Arturo Sabroso, Secretary-General Francisco Aguirre, Sir Vincent Tewson of the ICFTU Executive Board, and Jacob Potofsky of the CIO.<sup>10</sup>

## STATUTES OF ORIT

One major action of the Founding Congress of ORIT was the adoption of its statutes or constitution. This differed in one important regard from similar documents of CIT, CTAL and the Peronista ATLAS organization.

This difference was reflected in the title of the document: "Statutes of the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions." It spelled out in some detail the fact that ORIT was, in theory at least, not a free-standing organization but rather was the American regional organization of the ICFTU. Some years later this fact was to cause difficulties for ORIT, when for some years the AFL-CIO withdrew from the ICFTU but continued to be an affiliate of the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores.

The statutes, properly speaking, were preceded by a short Declaration of Principles, setting forth that the ICFTU, in furtherance of its principles, was establishing a number of regional organizations, "each one of which

will enjoy a high degree of autonomy in matters falling within its sphere, and will be responsible for its acts to the Confederation, the authority of which, according to its Statutes, must in all cases prevail."

The Declaration of Principles ended with the provision that "[t]he organizations affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions that are located in the zone or the region corresponding to each regional organization . . . must participate in this Organism, which is in any case guaranteed its autonomy, as is expressly assured in the Statutes of the Confederation."

Article 1 of the Statutes set forth that the purpose of ORIT was "to facilitate the development of the interests of the organizations affiliated to the ICFTU in the Western Hemisphere, and to counsel, assist and cooperate with the Confederation in its efforts to fulfill in this region the ends sought by the Confederation," which are then listed in some detail.

Article 2 set forth the functions of ORIT. These included recruiting new affiliates for the ICFTU, and advising the Executive Committee of the ICFTU about organizations that applied for affiliation, organizing regional and local conferences to discuss regional problems, and suggest appropriate actions to ICFTU congresses or the Executive Committee of the organization. Other functions were to gather and distribute information on social and labor conditions, social legislation and other appropriate matters, and provide this material to both ORIT and ICFTU publications; and to represent the ICFTU in regional meetings of such bodies as the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and International Labor Organization.

Article 3 stated that the "sphere of action" of ORIT to be "all the territories of the Western Hemisphere."

Article 4 provided that the congresses of ORIT should decide where the headquarters of the organization should be located, although this decision "must be subject to ratification by the Executive Committee of the ICFTU."

Article 5 appeared to have some contradiction with the Statement of Principles that preceded the statutes. It provided that any American regional ICFTU affiliate could belong to ORIT, but that such membership was not obligatory. It also included that ORIT could suspend or expel from its ranks an affiliate, but must inform the ICFTU of its action and the reasons for it. Also, an affiliate thus treated by ORIT could appeal to the Executive Committee of the ICFTU, or to the Congress of ORIT, "whose decisions will be definitive." Finally disciplinary actions by the ICFTU toward any affiliate "will be applied automatically by the ORIT."

Articles 6–8 dealt with the finances of ORIT, providing for regular contributions from the affiliates (which in practice came to be honored more in the breach than in fulfillment). Of particular significance perhaps was Article 8 which provided that "[t]he patrimony of the ORIT belongs to the ICFTU and will revert to it in case of dissolution of the former."



Article 9 provided that the business of ORIT would be determined by its congresses, the Executive Committee and its Secretariat, in that order of authority.

Article 10 dealt with congresses of the organization. It set forth the number of delegates individual affiliates could have, depending on the size of their membership. It also provided that to be represented, an affiliate would have to be up-to-date in its dues payments, a point that it is very doubtful was ever strictly enforced. It was provided that the Executive Committee of the ICFTU should be informed of an ORIT congress at least two months in advance, and must be invited to be represented. The functions of the congresses were spelled out in some detail.

Article 11 dealt with the Executive Committee of ORIT. Of particular interest there was the apportionment of membership in that body among affiliates. It provided that there should be three from North America, one from the Antilles, two each from Mexico, Central America, and from the West Indies and Guyanas, and five from South America. Each member was to have an alternate, who would attend Executive Committee meetings if the member could not do so.

Article 12 discussed the Secretariat of ORIT, consisting of the president, regional secretary and assistant secretaries; Article 13 dealt with the president and regional secretary.

The last four articles of the ORIT constitution concerned its relationship with the ICFTU. Article 14 said: "The decisions which affect the general policy to be followed that are adopted by the Regional Congress and the Regional Executive Committee will be considered as proposals made by the ORIT to the Executive Committee, to the General Council and the Congress of the ICFTU." The next article said, "No propaganda material can be used the content of which is in contradiction to the ends of the ICFTU as expressed in its Statutes and which could offend any organization affiliated with the ICFTU."

Article 16 dealt with the suspension or dissolution of ORIT. It provided that "[t]he activities of ORIT can be suspended by decision of the Executive Committee of the ICFTU, and the Regional Organization can be dissolved by decision of the General Council or the Congress of the ICFTU," and set forth the conditions under which that could occur.

Finally, Article 17 stated that reforms in ORIT statutes had to be sent to ORIT affiliates at least thirty days before the date of an ORIT congress, and "[t]he Statutes of the ORIT and amendments in the same, will enter into effect upon their adoption by the Regional Congress, except those which require approval of the Executive Committee of the ICFTU, whose decision shall be definitive."<sup>11</sup>

## TRANSFER OF ORIT HEADQUARTERS TO MEXICO

As we have noted, among the reasons for the Confederación de Trabajadores de México refusing to become part of ORIT and withdrawing from

the ICFTU were the decisions to have the headquarters of ORIT in Havana and to name a Cuban, Francisco Aguirre, as the first Regional Secretary (general secretary) of the new labor group. However, by the time the Second Congress of the ORIT was held in Rio de Janeiro in December 1952 that situation had changed.

In March 1952 General Fulgencio Batista seized power in Cuba by a military coup. The Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, which was then controlled by the Partido Auténtico, had been a strong supporter of the president whom Batista overthrew, Carlos Prío Socarrás. Although the leaders of the CTC sought to organize a general strike against Batista's coup, it was unsuccessful, and the CTC leaders were forced to reach an agreement with General Batista, fearing that otherwise he would seek to destroy the confederación.

These events began a long crisis in the history of the Cuban labor movement. Increasingly, the principal CTC leaders made concessions to the Batista regime, and General (after 1954 President) Batista took measures to strengthen the position of those same leaders against a rising tide of opposition within the labor movement against both them and the Batista regime.

In the face of the increasingly precarious situation of the Cuban labor movement after the Batista coup, two things of importance for ORIT occurred. On the one hand, leaders of the CTM decided to rejoin both ORIT and ICFTU. Serafino Romualdi described how that came to pass:

Through the good offices of the late Trifón Gómez, a prominent Spanish labor leader in exile, who was the Latin American representative of the International Transport Workers Federation, discreet contacts were established with Mexican CTM leader Fidel Velázquez. At the invitation of the ICFTU, Velázquez went to Brussels and was received by ICFTU representatives. He gave a favorable interview...in which he clearly hinted that the CTM was going to rejoin the ICFTU through ORIT. His contacts were expanded to include representatives of the AFL, the CIO and the Canadian affiliates. The CTM was ready to join ORIT and would welcome transfer of the ORIT headquarters to Mexico City, if the next convention should so decide.<sup>12</sup>

The second major factor was that it became clear to all of the leading figures in ORIT that the headquarters of the organization had to be moved out of Cuba. With the affiliation of the CTM with the ICFTU and ORIT, the most logical place for it to be located was Mexico City.

The altered situation was reflected in the new leadership of ORIT chosen by the Second Congress of the organization in December 1952. Luis Alberto Monge, the Costa Rican union leader, was chosen to replace Francisco Aguirre as secretary-general, and at first no Cuban at all was elected to the Executive Committee. However, the Puerto Rican unionist Hipólito Marcano, who was first elected, decided that, in order to name a Cuban on the Executive, he would resign; he was succeeded by José Pérez González



(a supporter of General Batista who had been co-opted into the CTC National Committee after the March 1952 coup).

Not only was the headquarters of ORIT moved to Mexico City, but officials of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* figured prominently in the new leadership chosen at the Second Congress. Fidel Velázquez was added to the Executive Committee, and Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga was made an assistant secretary, along with the Cuban maritime workers' leader Ignacio González Tellechea and representatives of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations.<sup>13</sup>

In August 1953, Fidel Velázquez, secretary-general of the CTM, told me that he "would like to forget" the events of 1951. He added that by 1953 "everyone is working enthusiastically" in ORIT.<sup>14</sup>

### LUIS ALBERTO MONGE AS SECRETARY-GENERAL

Perhaps the most important decision of the Second Congress of ORIT was to elect Luis Alberto Monge as secretary-general of the organization. This took place not only because of the problems that had arisen in Cuba, but also because of the inadequate job that the Cuban trade unionist Francisco Aguirre had done in the post during the first two years in ORIT's defense.

I had noted that inadequacy in a report that I made to Jay Lovestone, head of the Free Trade Union Committee, then the virtual Foreign Office of the AFL, after a trip to Latin America for the Committee that I had made in the summer of 1952. In summing up the problems facing the coming Second Congress of ORIT, I noted: "Perhaps more important than a re-statement of principle is reorganization of personnel. In this connection, the first necessity is that Francisco Aguirre cease being secretary general of the organization. There is universal discontent with his handling of affairs. He cannot or will not devote enough time to the job to be an effective secretary general. He seldom goes to his ORIT office, but refuses to allow anything to be done except with his supervision. Hence, nothing gets done."

I suggested to Lovestone that the best choice for the job would be Luis Alberto Monge, saying: "If he could be argued into taking the job, he would be the perfect man for the position. Young, intelligent, worldly-wise but not cynical, energetic, he would be able to do a bang-up job, in my estimation. Also, he is not quite so tied up in politics that this would be a drawback."<sup>15</sup>

Although my comments certainly had little influence in the decision to appoint Monge, the choice of the second ORIT congress to make that appointment would seem to indicate that the delegates there agreed with my assessment of him.

Monge (who many years later would be president of Costa Rica) was one of the founders of the *Rerum Novarum* Confederation of Labor. In 1948, when its principal organizer, Padre Benjamín Núñez, became

minister of labor, Monge had become *Rerum Novarum*'s secretary-general. He had been one of the founders of the *Confederación Interamericana Trabajadores* (CIT).

Luis Alberto Monge remained secretary-general of ORIT for about six years. He was faced with serious problems during his first year, particularly financial ones, because of the way ORIT funds had been handled before he took office. The situation required him to convince the U.S. labor leaders, whose organizations were at the time the principal source of ORIT's income, that he was not going to waste funds as his predecessor had done. He soon overcame these problems.<sup>16</sup>

During Monge's period in charge of ORIT, the organization became firmly established. He greatly expanded its activities, and under his leadership it became without question the predominant hemispheric trade union group.

ORIT had an ample range of activities during the Monge period. Some of these had begun before Monge became secretary-general and continued after he left that post, but were particularly extensive during his incumbency. These included organizational work, strong campaigns against dictatorial regimes in Latin America, union leadership training, opposition to Communist influence in organized labor and elsewhere, and extensive publicity and information activity.

## ORGANIZATIONAL WORK OF ORIT

Both CIT and ORIT had among their other tasks that of helping to bring into existence effective labor movements—particularly central labor organizations—in countries in which none existed, or at least where none existed that was affiliated with the inter-American labor movement. Until Monge's period as secretary-general of ORIT, this work had not been notably successful.

One such effort had taken place in Bolivia. There by the 1940s there existed two central labor groups. One was the *Federación Obrera Local* (FOL), based principally in and near La Paz, which was of anarchist orientation and had been particularly influential in organizing Indian peasants in the vicinity of La Paz. The other was the *Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia* (CSTB), which included some industrial workers and craftsmen's organizations, and was under the influence of the Stalinist-inclined *Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* (PIR).

In the 1940s, a third element appeared in the Bolivian labor movement. This was the *Federación Minera*, made up principally of the tin miners' unions. More or less allied with the miners were some organizations of industrial workers and a few other groups. These were generally under the influence of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR), a party bearing some resemblance to the Aprista Party of Peru, although Trotskyists also had considerable importance in the Miners Federation.

However, the MNR, which had shared power with an element from the Bolivian armed forces under President Villarroel between December 1943 and July 1946, had been accused by opponents of the Villarroel regime, particularly by the PIR and CSTB, of being fascists, and the leaders of the CIT and ORIT had not seriously questioned that charge.

As a consequence of this, CIT and ORIT had encouraged the development of a fourth element, labeled democratic, in the Bolivian labor movement. This resulted in the formation of the *Confederación Obrera de Bolivia*, which became affiliated with, successively, CIT and ORIT.

Then in April 1952 there occurred the Bolivian National Revolution. This was an insurrection led by the MNR with support from the miners' and urban workers' unions in La Paz and other cities, which within a few years nationalized the tin mines, carried out a massive land redistribution process, giving most of the land of the highlands back to the Indians, establishing (among other things) universal adult suffrage, and organizing a massive literacy campaign, particularly among the peasants.

Soon after the beginning of the Bolivian National Revolution a new central labor organization, the *Central Obrera Boliviana*, was established under MNR control. With the appearance of COB, the other central labor groups disappeared—ORIT's affiliate declaring itself out of existence, the CSTB melting away, and even the anarchists' FOL was reduced to a handful of craftsmen organizations in La Paz.

ORIT, of course, was anxious to gain the affiliation of COB—as were CTAL and the emerging Peronista hemispheric labor movement. However, COB leaders, headed by the miners' union leader Juan Lechín, insisted on COB remaining independent, but with "friendly relations" with all international labor groups.<sup>17</sup> This independence was demonstrated when COB sent only a fraternal delegation to the Second Congress of ORIT in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>18</sup>

However, ORIT's organizational activities were much more successful in several other countries. After the Second Congress, there were two very active officials of ORIT whose task it was to conduct organizational activities. One of these was Arturo Jáuregui, an exiled leader of the *Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú*, who was the South Atlantic representative of CIT and then of ORIT; the other was Augusto Malavé, exiled secretary-general of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela*, whose sphere of activity was Central America and northern South America.

Arturo Jáuregui was particularly active both as a CIT and ORIT representative in dealing with the labor movements of Uruguay and Paraguay, and played a role in the development of ORIT affiliates in both of those countries. In 1942, most of the Uruguayan unions had been brought together in the *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT), in which, politically speaking, there was an uneasy peace between the Communists (headed by the UGT Secretary-General Enrique Rodríguez), the Socialists, and other elements opposed to Communist control of the organization. In the

mid 1940s, the UGT split apart, with the Communists maintaining formal control of it, but most of the non-Communist elements withdrawing.

Jáuregui worked diligently to convince the non-Communist labor elements, particularly the Socialists, to form a new central labor organization and to affiliate it with CIT. In January 1951 he was finally successful, when the *Confederación Sindical Uruguaya* was established. Its leader, Luis Alberto Colotuzzo, later served as president of ORIT.

The situation in Paraguay was more difficult. There, in the aftermath of the Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia (1932–1935)—after several changes in the regime—the traditional *Partido Colorado* came to power. Under Colorado President Higinio Morínigo, a severe dictatorship was established. Although he was finally overthrown, the Colorados remained in power, and in 1954 General Alfredo Stroessner was elected by that party in a poll in which he was the only candidate. He was destined to remain in power for more than a quarter of a century.

The labor movement suffered severely from the political instability and from harsh treatment by successive governments. The *Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores del Paraguay*, the central labor organization in which Communists shared leadership with other political elements, was suppressed by the Morínigo government in 1940. In its place, the Colorado Party established the *Organización Republicana Obrera (ORO)*, which was, for practical purposes, the only legal labor organization.

Arturo Jáuregui established contact with the ORO and with his encouragement it became the *Confederación Paraguaya de Trabajadores (CPT)*, which joined ORIT. However, the subsequent history of relations of the Paraguayan labor movement with ORIT and ICFTU was a checkered one.

There was a general strike called by the CPT in 1958, ruthlessly suppressed by the Stroessner government, which displaced the CPT elected leadership with police officials and other servants of the dictatorships. This brought a suspension of the CPT from ORIT and ICFTU membership. In 1974, Julio Etcheverry, head of the CPT-in-Exile, which had been formed by the former leaders of the CPT, was chosen as secretary-general of ORIT. In 1979, the CPT was definitively expelled from the ICFTU and ORIT.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, with the ouster of the Stroessner dictatorship in 1989, the Paraguayan labor movement received a new lease on life. The largest of several labor groups to emerge at that time, the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, joined ORIT and ICFTU.<sup>20</sup>

Augusto Malavé Villalba played particularly important role in the appearance of a modern labor movement in Honduras. In spring 1954, a widespread strike developed in the banana fields of the United and Standard Fruit Companies on the north coast of Honduras. Quite unexpectedly, President Juan Gálvez did not move to crush the strike, but rather brought pressure on the banana companies to settle with their workers, and agreements were finally signed bringing the walkouts to an end.

Out of this strike the labor movement of the Republic of Honduras developed. Malavé rushed to Honduras soon after the outbreak of the banana strike, and played a part in negotiating with the banana companies. Subsequently, he helped to transform the *de facto* strike organizations into trade unions, in the development of federations in the northern and southern parts of the country, and then in the establishment of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Honduras, which became an affiliate of ORIT.<sup>21</sup>

Chile was one country in which efforts to get a substantial part of the labor movement to affiliate with ORIT failed. The Socialist faction of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile (CTCh), of course, had been a founding member of both CIT and the ORIT. However, in 1952, due in large part to fear of the intentions of the newly elected president, Carlos Ibáñez (a onetime dictator) insofar as the labor movement was concerned, there developed an almost irresistible drive to unify the labor movement. As a result, the Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile (CUTCh) was founded. It included most unions formerly belonging to one or another of the CTCh factions, as well as a number that had not been part of either. It decided not to affiliate, for the time being at least, with any international labor group.

As a result of the formation of the CUTCh, what remained of the former Socialist CTCh was reduced to what Luis Alberto Monge himself called "the phantom CTCH." Attention then centered on trying to get a number of the national unions that were not controlled by the Communists to themselves join ORIT and ICFTU. Meetings were held between ORIT representatives and leaders of copper, maritime, petroleum, chemical and pharmacy, bank workers and bakers, and for a while Monge and others had considerable hope that an appreciable segment of the Chilean labor movement could be recruited by ORIT and ICFTU.<sup>22</sup> However, nothing finally came of these negotiations. The only Chilean organizations that joined and stayed as affiliates of ORIT and ICFTU were the Maritime Workers Federation and the small sugar workers' union.

## PROTEST AGAINST DICTATORIAL REGIMES

An important activity of ORIT during the period in which Luis Alberto Monge was its secretary-general was agitation against a number of Latin American dictators of the period, and against their persecution of their national labor movements. In this, ORIT continued on a path already taken by its predecessor, the CIT.

Luis Alberto Monge put forth many times ORIT's position on this subject. In 1957, in a pamphlet published by ORIT, he wrote:

The Latin American dictatorships, with the exception of the Peronista one, which has other characteristics, are the product of the action of oligarchical and Plutocratic groups, sometimes in coalition with International capitalism, for the purposes of

maintaining their position of dominance over the majority, necessary to maintain their position of economic and social privileges.... The struggle of trade union movement against the dictators must continue until they are liquidated. There can be no possibility of an understanding between the dictatorships and the authentic democratic and free trade union movement that we are trying to consolidate. This is not only because they impede the formation of free and independent unions, but because upon their liquidation depends also what goals of economic and social development we can achieve... made difficult by the repressive actions of the forces that sustain these dictatorships.<sup>23</sup>

The Founding Congress of ORIT passed resolutions condemning the Latin American dictatorships. For instance, one denounced the kidnapping from Cuba (and presumed murder) of Mauricio Báez, the outstanding labor leader of the Dominican Republic (who had no association with ORIT), by the government of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, the most fearful Latin American dictator of that period.

However, ORIT did not confine itself to resolutions in its campaign against the dictators. In making Arturo Sabroso, the head of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú, the first president of ORIT, the objective was clearly to bring pressure on the dictatorship of General Manuel Odría to end, or at least modify, its persecution of that country's labor movement. Also by employing in one capacity or another exiled Peruvian, Venezuelan, and Dominican trade union leaders, ORIT not only made it possible for them to make a living, but also to carry on their struggles against the dictatorships of President Odría, Pérez Jiménez, and Trujillo.

Serafino Romualdi listed some of those exiled unionists who had worked for ORIT in its early years. They included the Peruvians Arturo Jáuregui, who served as an ORIT organizer and then was for a short while acting secretary-general in 1957–1958; Ricardo Temoche Benitez, who was directory of workers' education for ORIT, and Leopoldo Pita, a leader of the Peruvian sugar workers, who served as an ORIT organizer. The Venezuelans, in addition to Augusto Malavé Villalba, included Pedro Pérez Salinas, who was assistant director of education, and Manuel Méndez, who succeeded Temoche as director of education.<sup>24</sup>

Early in May 1954 a Conference of Democratic Trade Union Exiles of Latin America was held in Mexico City under ORIT patronage. Those attending were Alfredo Fidanza, secretary-general of the COASI, the Socialist-run group of anti-Peronista trade unions; Angel Miolán and Nicolás Silfa of the Comité Obrero Dominicano Democrático, a group associated with the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano, the most important party opposing the tyranny of Rafael Trujillo; the Peruvian unionists Leopoldo Pita, secretary-general of the Sugar Workers Federation, and Rafael Lovett, secretary-general of the Textile Workers Federation; and the Venezuelans Augusto Malavé Villalba and Vicente Gamboa Marcano of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela. As an observer, Rubén Vilatoro, head of the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores Libres de Guatemala,



a small group opposed to the Communist-controlled Confederación General de Trabajadores Libres de Guatemala, also attended the meeting.

The conference passed a number of resolutions attacking the suppression of trade union rights, particularly in the homelands of the delegates, denouncing the collaboration of Communist-led trade union groups with the dictatorships, and dealing with problems faced by exiles from the dictatorships to gain legal admission to other American countries.<sup>25</sup>

The conference voted to establish an organization, the Comité de Exilados Sindicalistas Democráticos de América Latina (CESDAL), and to have that Comité publish a periodical, *Boletín del Cesdal*, at least one copy of which appeared.<sup>26</sup>

ORIT went beyond protesting about the strictly antilabor activities of the dictatorships, and denounced them for their more generally repressive actions. For instance, the organization denounced them for their more generally repressive actions. For instance, the organization denounced the Odría dictatorship's refusal to give a safe conduct to the Peruvian political leader Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who consequently spent almost four years as a virtual prisoner in the Colombian Embassy in Lima; it strongly supported the Costa Rican government of José Figueres in the face of invasion by troops of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza in January 1955; it also strongly applauded the refusal of the Figueres government to send a delegation to the Tenth Conference of the Organization of American States (OAS) in March 1954 because it was held in Venezuela, where the dictatorship of General Pérez Jiménez was violating all of the democratic principles for which the OAS supposedly stood.<sup>27</sup>

## THE GUATEMALAN CASE

One situation that aroused considerable controversy within ORIT, and was used by its opponents to try to discredit its attitude toward Latin American dictatorship, was the position that ORIT assumed with regard to the overthrow of the Guatemalan government of President Jacobo Arbenz in mid-1954. That government, in which the Communist Party had great influence, was overthrown by an invasion of Guatemalan opponents headed by ex-Colonel Castillo Armas that was largely organized and financed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Under Arbenz's predecessor, President Arévalo, there had developed two trade union groups, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Guatemala, which was controlled by the Communist Party and was affiliated with the CTAL, and the Federación Sindical de Guatemala, in which the Communists were a minority, and which had some sympathy for ORIT. However, upon the ascension to power of President Arbenz there was, under severe government pressure, a unification of the two groups into the Confederación General de Trabajadores de Guatemala (CGTG), in which Communist influence was dominant, and which joined CTAL.

The ORIT leadership certainly had no sympathy for the pro-Communist inclinations of the Arbenz regime or that regime's support for the Communist Party's seizure of control of virtually all of the country's labor movement, but it did not advocate foreign armed intervention against that government. Luis Alberto Monge issued a statement in April 1953 of the ORIT's position:

With regard to the situation in Guatemala, various press organs have insidiously attempted to present the ORIT as favoring 'an interventionist policy on the part of the Government of the United States of America.' Nothing could be more calumnious and contrary to the position maintained by the ORIT. We reject all attempts of any government or public or private institutions to intervene violently or pacifically, in internal affairs, even less to invoke the name of so-called 'crusade against Communism,' violation of the national sovereignty of any country. International agreements signed in competent organisms clearly express the means of dealing with such infractions.<sup>28</sup>

However, once the Arbenz government had been overthrown, ORIT's position became somewhat equivocal, undoubtedly reflecting differences of opinion within the leadership. The first reaction of ORIT to the fall of Arbenz was a statement issued on June 25, 1954, which said:

Whatever the results of the events in Guatemala, the ORIT reaffirmed with its actions its position of always in relation to that country: a). Defense of the economic and social conquests gained by the people, b). Permanent opposition to the groups that desire to establish a dictatorship, whether of right or left, in Guatemala, c). Repudiation of the imperialist policy of the United Fruit Co., and all interventionist politics, d). Efforts for economic and social reform to be realized without domination by the Communists, and for the trade union movement to be established on a democratic basis, e). Support of the people of Guatemala so that their freedom, their sovereignty and their social and economic progress will not suffer retreat or deterioration.

With the victory of President Castillo Armas, the CGTG was outlawed, as were all of its affiliates; many trade union leaders were jailed, or driven into exile, and some were killed. A difficult set of requirements was established for any union to regain legal standing. However, within a year, many of the individual unions had been legally recognized, and several small groupings of these unions had been established.

Some ORIT affiliates, most notably the AFL and CIO of the United States sent people into Guatemala to try to help reestablishment of the labor movement, and to bring pressure on the regime to permit the rebirth of a real labor movement. They also sought to strengthen those within the new regime who favored this, in the face of reactionary elements who were opposed to a labor movement of any kind. These unionists from outside of Guatemala had, at best, limited success.



The official position of ORIT with regard to post-Arbenz Guatemala was reflected in the Third Congress of ORIT in San José, Costa Rica in April 1955. The minister of labor of Guatemala was invited, "on the request of the representatives of the Guatemalan trade union movement in the Congress," to address that gathering. His comments were followed by a speech by ORIT Secretary-General Luis Alberto Monge "answering" the presentation of the minister.

Monge's speech neither supported the Castillo Armas government nor denounced it unequivocally. He said that "[t]he alternative was this: social progress that I would call pseudo-social progress, under Communist influence, or retrocession in economic, social and political terms in Guatemala under the influence of regressive forces. How can we aid the democratic forces of Guatemala? We open another possibility and that possibility can only be that of social progress, promotion of democracy by the positive forces of Guatemala." He argued that there was in process in Guatemala, and in its government, a struggle between

[t]he groups of political revenge, the groups that represent dark interests in the economic, social and political fields and that wish to make Guatemalan retrogress, and the groups that maintain persistent efforts to conserve the positive heritage, reinforce it... and at an opportune moment put Guatemala on the road that the people are asking for, that is, that of democracy and social justice. We cannot deny our support to those sectors that wish the second of these and when we have condemned certain things in the social and general policy of Guatemala we want it clear that our condemnation is of the former group, not of those who are sustaining the same positions as ours in the interior of Guatemala.

Monge ended his speech by summing up the position of ORIT with regard to Guatemala:

We have been observing, with objectivity, with criteria of responsibility, the development of events in Guatemala. Facing whatever definitive deviation that might occur there we will have a very clear position. If Guatemala retrogresses in its process of social and economic evolution due to pressure of the negative groups, we shall be against those groups and against the sectors of the Government that support them. If Guatemala retrogresses to a military dictatorship, we shall confront that military dictatorship. But also one must be valiant and responsible so as not to deny the truth for fear that we will be said to be agents of Yankee imperialism. If in Guatemala the democratic forces are strengthened, and if the forces of social progress are consolidated, we must recognize it and we must support those forces. It is very easy to undermine weak spirits with a simple slogan; it is easy to frighten some men by telling them that they are going to be called partisans of the dictatorships or defenders of Yankee Imperialism. But we, responsible men of the labor movement, do not have to be afraid of this, if on our side is the truth and are the orienting principles of the ORIT.<sup>29</sup>

## UNION LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

One of Luis Alberto Monge's major interests as secretary-general of ORIT was to help to provide leadership training for the organization's affiliates. He helped the member union groups to establish their own training programs, as well as mounting somewhat more advanced programs on a regional or sub-regional level. Such programs started soon after he took control of ORIT.<sup>30</sup>

Two programs will indicate their nature. For about a month in May and June 1954 a course under ORIT sponsorship was held in Montevideo, with 35 participants from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The subjects dealt with throughout the program included labor law, political economy, collective bargaining, and public speaking. There were also individual lectures on a variety of other matters, including the structure of the trade union movement, bookkeeping, the free trade union international organizations, and cooperatives. Later in the same year there was a similar course that met in Monterey, Mexico in September-October 1954. The subjects taught there were similar to those in the Montevideo sessions. There were 50 students from 14 Latin American and Caribbean countries in Monterey.<sup>31</sup>

Later, there was an arrangement worked out with the University of Puerto Rico for union leaders to go there on a regular continuing basis to a program of several months' duration. There, too, the subjects taught concentrated on unionization and management, collective bargaining, the history of organized labor, and related matters.

ORIT, together with the ICFTU, also published a pamphlet designed for those who were involved in organizing leadership training programs on a national or higher level. Entitled *Notas de Estudios Sindicales: Los Sindicatos, Que Son, Que Hacen, Su Estructura*, the introduction to the pamphlet stated, "How to use these notes on trade union studies" noting that they were useful on several levels: "The students can use these notes for individual study, through simply reading the material—The speakers can base their talks on the outline of the subject and on the material contained in these notes," and finally, "These notes can be used for a discussion or for a series of discussions in combination in combination with the Manual of Discussion for Leaders."<sup>32</sup>

ORIT, in addition to running training courses that brought together union leaders from various countries, also organized courses in a number of countries, both in Latin America and the Caribbean, specifically for the unionists of those nations. For instance, Ricardo Temoche, the exiled Peruvian union leader who was then the director of workers' education, helped the General Workers Union (GWU) of British Honduras to organize a four-week seminar in Belize City in July and August 1955 that included a general course in trade unionism taught by Temoche himself, and others

on labor legislation, trade union accounting, union journalism and documentation, and parliamentary procedure taught by top GWU officials and other presumed experts in the various subjects that they taught.<sup>33</sup>

## ORIT PUBLIC RELATIONS

Secretary-General Francisco Aguirre had not had the time or inclination to initiate an organized campaign to bring ORIT and its activities to the attention of the press and other news outlets. Luis Alberto Monge changed that situation. Among other things, he began to publish a series of pamphlets, dealing with ORIT and problems with which it was concerned. For another, he began issuing press releases once or twice a week that were sent directly to a number of leading newspapers, particularly in Latin America, as well as to the international news services.

The pamphlets dealt with a variety of ORIT concerns. The first one was *Que es la ORIT?*, which after a short historical background, discussed the organizational structure of ORIT, the national groups affiliated with it, and the various activities of the organization.<sup>34</sup> A subsequent one, *Interpretandonos (Interpreting Us)*, consisted of seven speeches by Luis Alberto Monge, in which he dealt with the history, purposes, ideology and activities of ORIT.<sup>35</sup>

Some of the pamphlets were clearly designed for use in ORIT's leadership training efforts. We have already mentioned *Notas de Estudios Sindicales*, which was of this nature. There was also *Manual de Prensa Obrera* which, after a short discussion of the press in general (particularly in Latin America), went on to emphasize the need for a labor press, followed by discussion of the kinds of periodicals that the labor movement could and should publish. Finally, the pamphlet had details on how labor press organs should present their materials.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the pamphlets were designed to defend the political and organizational positions of ORIT. One, *Los Sindicatos y la Amenaza Totalitaria*, was an attack on both Communist and fascist totalitarianism, but with particular emphasis on the Communists and the strategies they used to get control of unions and use them for their own purposes.<sup>37</sup> Another, *Ecos del Congreso Mundial de Estocolmo: ORIT*, consisted of a prologue by Monge and of two speeches given at the ICFTU 1953 congress by George Meany, then president of the AFL, and Walter P. Reuther, president of the CIO, all four pieces centering on the feasibility and desirability of an inter-American trade union organization rather than a purely Latin American one.<sup>38</sup>

By March 1955, the ORIT had in print 13 different pamphlets.<sup>39</sup>

By the time Luis Alberto Monge had been secretary-general for a year and half, ORIT was regularly issuing a press service with items being provided at least once a week, as well as four periodicals. One of these was *Noticiero Obrero Interamericano*, the official organ of ORIT, appearing once

a month, in English and Spanish; *Datos y Cifras*, described as a "bimonthly pamphlet of economic and social researches," also coming out in Spanish and English; *Boletim Sindicalista do Brasil*, published in Rio de Janeiro in Portuguese; and *Information Bulletin*, a monthly bulletin in English of the Caribbean Area Division of ORIT.<sup>40</sup>

## ORIT LOBBYING

Secretary-General Monge not infrequently engaged in what might best be called lobbying. He attempted to bring ORIT's point of view on economic and social matters to the attention of inter-governmental meetings dealing with those subjects, when particular issues demanded statements presenting ORIT's point of view. For instance, he sent a letter to the delegates to the First Conference of Inter-American Ministers of Economy and Finance that met in Rio de Janeiro in November 1954. In this message he stressed ORIT's support for moves of Latin American governments to form economic unions, and specifically, for negotiations on a Central American Common Market that were under way; and its belief that planning was essential to achieve economic development. He also emphasized ORIT's backing for Latin American industrialization and agrarian reform as necessary to development. Finally, Monge stressed that the increase in living standards of the workers and their right to organize and negotiate with their employers were an integral part of economic development in the Latin American region.<sup>41</sup>

On the occasion of a drastic fall in coffee prices early in 1955, Monge issued a statement noting that ORIT had always favored "just prices and easy markets for Latin American production in the international market." He pointed out that in the cases of fall in prices of Bolivian tin and lead and zinc in Mexico and Peru, ORIT had argued for stabilization of prices, and in this had had the support of the AFL, CIO, and United Mine Workers, ORIT's U.S. affiliates. He argued that "[i]f speculative maneuvers with Latin American products are tolerated, there is engendered misery of many millions of human beings and as a result the sentiments of discord area easily engendered." On the other hand, if such speculation was stopped, "the trade union movements of the coffee countries will have the possibility of demanding better living working conditions."<sup>42</sup>

On at least one occasion, on October 6, 1953, Monge led an ORIT delegation that met with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs John Moors Cabot to present to him the organization's criticism of and suggestions with regard to the U.S. government's Western Hemisphere policies. The other members of the delegation were ORIT Assistant Secretaries Serafino Romualdi (AFL), Ernst Schwarz (CIO), Paul Reid (United Mine Workers), and Ignacio González Tellechea (Cuban CTC).

After conferring with Cabot, the ORIT delegation left with him a memorandum that ended with a number of recommendations which "in the

judgment of the free labor movement will contribute to liquidating the irritants and differences that may exist between the Latin American countries and the government of the United States, and thus will strengthen the continental solidarity in support of the struggle for democracy in the whole world." In the "economic and social" category, these recommendations were intensification of U.S. aid to Latin American economic development, "making the North American companies that operate in Latin America see that they must abstain absolutely from intervening in the internal politics of our countries; that they should contribute more equitably to the national income, through just payment of taxes and by receiving with a spirit of comprehension the demands of the free labor movement," and adoption by the U.S. government of a more liberal policy toward imports from Latin America.

In political terms this memorandum recommended that the U.S. government "intensify relations" with democratic governments, "avoid all actions that might be seen as endorsement of dictatorships," and, to assure that U.S. arms provided to Latin America not to be used to kill Latin American democrats, the U.S. should not give either military or economic aid to the dictatorships. The memorandum also urged a large program of exchange among "intellectuals, artists and trade union officials." It ended with the demand that the United States (and other democratic governments) should not participate in the Tenth Pan American Conference scheduled for Caracas, unless freedom was reestablished in Venezuela, and urged that the United States use its influence to get the Peruvian dictatorship to give a safe conduct to Haya de la Torre to leave the Colombian Embassy in Lima and go abroad.<sup>43</sup>

## THE CRISIS OVER CUBA

Luis Alberto Monge resigned in May 1958 to return to Costa Rica to participate in politics there. He was succeeded as secretary-general, on a more or less interim basis, by Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga of the Mexican CTM. In 1961, Arturo Jáuregui, who had been in the leadership group of ORIT since its inception, became secretary-general.<sup>44</sup>

By the time that Monge resigned from the leadership of ORIT, the organization was faced with a major crisis because of developments in the Cuban labor movement. With the failure of the attempt of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba to carry out a general strike against the seizure of power by General Fulgencio Batista in March 1952, there was fear in the CTC that Batista would either seize control of it or destroy it. For 15 months there was what Luis Alberto Monge called an "armed truce" between the CTC and Batista which, among other things, included the incorporation of a labor supporter of Batista, José Pérez González, in the CTC leadership. However, Monge felt that until 1953 it could not be said that the labor leadership had surrendered to Batista.

However, Monge concluded that after the unsuccessful attempt of rebels led by Fidel Castro to seize the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953 the "armed truce" between the CTC and the dictator was no longer possible. Following the July 26 events, Batista had enacted a Law of Public Order that Monge described as "one of the most barbarous in the whole American continent."

Monge concluded that the new situation could force the CTC leaders to either confront the Batista regime or surrender to it. He commented that a speech by CTC Secretary-General Eusebio Mujal denouncing the July 26th attack, saying that the CTC did not believe in the use of force to overthrow the government, was seen by many as a surrender to Batista.<sup>45</sup>

This, indeed, proved to be the case. Increasingly, Eusebio Mujal and those associated with him in the leadership of the CTC opposed any efforts to overthrow the Batista regime, and particularly any attempts to use the labor movement for that purpose. In effect, they ended up as virtual partners of the dictator.

For his part, Batista sought to do whatever he could to strengthen the position of Mujal and his associates against rising criticism and opposition. He enacted laws giving the CTC top leadership control over all dues paid to the confederación's affiliates, and legalizing the Mujal leadership's moves to remove leaders in those affiliates and in the CTC top leadership who opposed the Mujal position. One result was a large-scale purge of Mujal opponents from leadership in the labor movement; the most notable victim of this purge was Angel Corfio, longtime head of the Electrical Workers Federation.<sup>46</sup>

These events created a grave situation for ORIT. The CTC had been one of the founding organizations of ORIT and of its predecessor, CIT, and Eusebio Mujal and people associated with him had been important early leaders of ORIT. There was, understandably, a degree of personal sympathy for CTC leaders, which brought the ORIT leaders to have some hesitation about criticizing the CTC and even Batista.

In its campaign against the Latin American dictators, ORIT had notably not denounced the Batista regime. The AFL-CIO members of the ORIT leadership were particularly hesitant to do so.

According to Arturo Jáuregui, just before Fidel Castro launched his guerrilla war in Cuba, he approached ORIT, seeking its support for his coming fight against Batista. Although there was much sympathy for this struggle, the ORIT leaders' discussion with Fidel caused serious doubts. When they asked him what his social program would be should he win, his reply was that he would deal with a social program once the revolution had been won, that the first thing was to overthrow the Batista regime, and that he would worry about the post-Batista situation after that had been achieved. The ORIT leaders felt that under those circumstances they could not offer any backing to the proposed guerrilla struggle against the Batista regime.<sup>47</sup>



However, by 1957 the North American unionists, according to Luis Alberto Monge, were willing to "crack down" on the CTC leadership. At that point, leaders of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, who were quarreling on various issues with the AFL-CIO, came to the support of Mujal, and the AFL-CIO leaders backed down on the Cuban matter.

Nevertheless, following this incident Luis Alberto Monge issued a very strong attack on the Batista regime in his capacity as secretary-general of ORIT. Thereupon, Eusebio Mujal called for Monge's ouster, and although he soon became convinced that that was not likely to happen, Mujal did send an eight-man delegation to a meeting of the ORIT Executive Council in Washington, DC, in January 1958. A discussion went on for three days between the majority of the Council members, who ended up issuing a denunciation of the Batista regime, and the CTC representative, who opposed this and demanded a "compromise." No compromise on whether or not to issue such a denunciation was possible.<sup>48</sup>

The resolution adopted by the ORIT Executive Council started out by repeating a recent statement that the Batista regime "is undoubtedly a military dictatorship." It then said, "Historically, the free labor movement and the ORIT specifically have refrained from involvement in the political struggles within any nation where the struggle has been carried out in a democratic manner, and without suppression of the rights or destruction of lives or the liberties of the people."

However, the resolution ended up saying, "We are deeply concerned with the preservation of life, liberty and democracy within Cuba, and with the preservation of the strong and effective labor movement in Cuba. We express herewith our sympathetic understanding of the problems of our affiliate, and we reaffirm our historic policy of opposition to all forms of oppression and dictatorship."<sup>49</sup>

Monge expected that after this meeting and its declaration, the CTC would officially withdraw from ORIT.<sup>50</sup> That did not happen, but with the success of the Castro revolution on January 1, 1959, the issue of whether or not the CTC should remain a part of ORIT became an issue of debate and discussion among the new leadership of the CTC.

In three visits to Cuba in 1959 in the months following the Revolution, I got the impression that most of the top unionists of Fidel Castro's 26th July Movement, although very critical of the way ORIT had behaved toward the CTC during the Batista dictatorship, favored maintaining the CTC's membership in ORIT. However, ORIT did not move sufficiently rapidly or extensively to take advantage of that fact. Perhaps Serafino Romualdi in his autobiography explained why this was the case. He wrote that Secretary-General Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga "was confronted with a difficult, almost impossible task. On the one hand, could he ignore the new Cuban revolutionary labor leadership that then was proclaiming to the four winds its allegedly democratic, anti-Communist position, and on the other hand could he repudiate the old elected CTC leadership—as the

revolutionaries were demanding? Alfonso chose a middle course, temporizing and giving in a little when such action was advisable, but refusing to judge when the demands implied the commission of a dishonorable act."<sup>51</sup> Such "compromise" played into the hands of those elements who wanted the CTC to leave and denounce ORIT.

In the fateful Tenth Congress of the CTC in November 1959, where Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, and the minister of labor all called for the Communists who had 5 percent of the delegates, and the 26th of July Movement who had 90 percent, to have equal representation in the new Executive Committee of the CTC, ORIT was repudiated.

Although the Tenth Congress refused to give equal representation to Communists and Fidelistas in the new CTC Executive, they did, in effect, allow Fidel Castro himself to choose the new Executive. Those he selected did not include any avowed Communists, but they were in great majority what were laughingly called watermelons, that is, people who were green (the 26th of July color) outside and red inside. They promptly set up a purge committee, which removed within a few months the post-revolutionary leaders of more than half of the CTC's affiliates who only a few months before had been democratically elected. By the next CTC congress, the leadership of the Communist became overt.<sup>52</sup>

One resolution favored by Fidel Castro that was passed by the Tenth Congress was to withdraw from ORIT and issue a call for the formation of a new Latin American labor organization, presumably in competition not only with ORIT but also with the Communist-controlled CTAL.

The Castro government's seizure of control of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba and its reorganization of the Cuban labor movement on a Stalinist-type pattern caused its function to be the stimulation of production and productivity instead of the defense of the workers' interests and points of view in negotiations with the employers (reduced to a single employer, the state, with the government's seizure of the economy). At this point, ORIT became very hostile to the Castro regime. This was very clear at the Fifth Congress of ORIT in August 1961, the first such meeting after the beginning of the Cuban Revolution.

The Fifth ORIT Congress adopted an extensive "Declaration on the Political Situation in the American Continent," which contained two long paragraphs devoted to Cuba. It began:

We address an emphatic appeal to the people of the Americas to be on guard against the danger represented by the presence in our midst of totalitarian communism, which has come through the Cuban door and is now attempting to extend its influence to the rest of our American countries.... Those who fight against Fidel Castro fight in favor of their own country and of all our American people. True to our democratic tradition, we fought yesterday against the military dictatorships of Fulgencio Batista. In order to remain loyal to the same democratic tradition, we have today the political and moral obligation to fight against the communistic tyranny of Fidel Castro.



The second paragraph of this declaration dealing with Cuba specifically concerned what had happened to the labor movement under the Castro regime. It said:

The labor movement in Cuba has been transformed into an appendix of the totalitarian apparatus; the youth and the workers have been compelled to don military uniforms; collective bargaining has been completely suppressed; trade union rights, including the right to strike, and the working conditions of all the wage-earners are completely at the mercy of the whims and caprices of the tyrant and his henchmen. Wages have been reduced and employment has been regimented. The situation in which our Cuban brothers find themselves amply justifies and explains our vigorous protest against this regime of terror and slavery.<sup>53</sup>

### **FIDELISTA ATTEMPT TO LAUNCH NEW A LATIN AMERICAN LABOR CONFEDERATION**

As we have noted, the CTC Fifth Congress issued a call for formation of a new Latin American labor confederation. At first, this call received at least some encouragement from two national labor groups, the Confederación Única de Trabajadores de Chile and the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela.

The CUTCh was an organization with heterogeneous membership, politically speaking. Although the Communists were preponderant, Christian Democratic and other tendencies were sufficiently strong to prevent its joining CTAL and to pledge the CUTCh to independence in terms of international affiliation, but the call from the new Cuban CTC did not seem to conflict with the independence to which the CUTCh was pledged.

The CTV had just been reorganized within Venezuela, after the fall of the dictatorship of General Pérez Jiménez in January 1958. There, too, the heterogeneous political nature of the reconstituted confederation forced the Acción Democrática Party people who favored continued ORIT affiliation, to agree, for the time being, to remain independent. Tom Brooks reported in March 1960, "The Venezuelan Confederation of Labor (CTV) has called a conference in Caracas to discuss organizational unity among all Latin American labor groups, including ORIT, the Christian unions, the remnants of the CTAL and assorted independents."<sup>54</sup>

Nothing came of this conference call. When the Acción Democrática and Catholic Social Copei parties soon afterward got full control of the CTV, eliminating the Communists from its leadership, they brought the CTV back into ORIT in January 1963.<sup>55</sup>

### **ORIT IN THE 1960s**

The period between 1961 and 1970 was a period of great activity and considerable influence for ORIT. At the Fifth Congress of the organization in

August 1961, the Peruvian trade unionist Arturo Jáuregui was chosen as secretary-general, a post he held for almost a decade and a half. He had been part of the leadership of ORIT and its predecessor since CIT's establishment in January 1948. During most of the 1950s he had been influential in gaining the affiliation of several of the Brazilian confederations with ORIT, and in helping to organize labor groups in Uruguay and Paraguay, which also joined.

Upon taking over the leadership, Jáuregui reorganized the administration of ORIT. He was also able to expand its range of activities considerably and its personnel. By August 1963, there were 65 people on the ORIT's payroll, including twelve organizers in various parts of Latin America.<sup>56</sup>

The membership of the organization also grew during the 1960s. As we have noted, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela finally rejoined ORIT in 1963. For the first time, some significant Argentine unions became affiliates: the Confederation of Municipal Workers and the General Confederation of Commercial Employees. At the Seventh Congress of ORIT in March 1970 there was even a fraternal delegation from the Argentine central labor group, the Confederación General del Trabajo.<sup>57</sup>

Small union groups in Bolivia and Chile also became part of ORIT, although the Bolivian national central labor group, the COB, remained independent. One significant addition in the Caribbean area was the entry in 1967 of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU), which had been refused entry earlier because of the opposition of the National Workers Union (NWU), one of the founding organizations of ORIT. With the affiliation of the BITU (with the approval of the NWU), virtually the whole of the Jamaican labor movement belonged to ORIT. Those parts of the labor of Honduras that had not until then belonged to ORIT joined it, and an affiliate of some scope was formed in Nicaragua.

Another important addition to the organization's ranks in the 1960's was the Confederación Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones Sindicales Libres (CEOSL), which had been established with considerable help from ORIT. It became a major rival of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador (CTE), controlled by the Communists and their Socialist allies, which had until then largely dominated the Ecuadorian labor movement.

ORIT also suffered some losses during this period. One of the most significant of these was the Confederación Sindical Uruguaya (CSU), which disappeared during the 1960s. Its place was taken by the Confederación Uruguaya de Trabajadores (CUT) which, however, was at best a marginal part of the Uruguayan labor movement.

However, the most important loss was the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), which, as we have seen, under pressure from the government of Fidel Castro, withdrew from ORIT. However, the efforts of the Fidelista-controlled CTC to establish a rival to ORIT failed. ORIT did not accept as affiliates any of the organizations formed by trade union

leaders who had fled Cuba after the Castro government's seizure of control of the labor movement.

There is little doubt that ORIT remained during the 1960s the largest and most representative of the regional labor organizations in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>58</sup>

During the 1960s, ORIT had a variety of different activities. These included an extensive leadership training program, organizational work, and the presentation of organized labor's point of view before a wide range of different non-labor organizations.

### LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN THE 1960s

ORIT's work in leadership of trade union officials reached a high point during the 1960s. However, at the same time, ORIT began to be faced with a competitor in this field that would subsequently undermine this kind of ORIT activity.

The Secretariat's report to the 1965 ORIT congress noted, "In accordance with the possibilities, the ORIT has sponsored educational programs in various countries and at different levels, adapting them as to form and sequence to the needs of each place, in order to obtain better results."<sup>59</sup> It then provided details on such courses in Colombia, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, and Peru.<sup>60</sup>

However, Arturo Jáuregui and other ORIT leaders had a much more ambitious labor education and training role in mind for the organization. They wanted to establish an Inter-American Labor College.

Jáuregui explained the need for and nature of the new college:

The day has passed in Latin America and the Caribbean when the only tools necessary for success in the labor movement were a loud voice, the ability to pound the table at negotiation and an anarchistic philosophy. The modern leaders must be part lawyer, economist, politician, psychologist and sociologist in order to be successful.... The Cuernavaca school will dedicate its program to the teaching of advanced trade union subjects. Many courses will deal with the techniques of teaching trade union subjects, so that the graduates can return to their countries well prepared to organize local courses and continue the 'missionary' work of building strong, free and democratic unions. We expect to pay considerable attention to collective bargaining and the use of labor statistics.

Jáuregui added:

Additionally, we will teach economics and the important role the workers must play in the development process. And we will also examine carefully the various international agencies, such as the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development

Bank, etc., so that our students will have a thorough appreciation of how these organizations can best serve the workers.<sup>61</sup>

With some financial help from the ICFTU, this project got under way on a modest scale in ORIT's Mexico City headquarters in April and May 1962. By the time of the preparation of the Secretariat's report to the Sixth Congress, six courses had been held by the Inter-American Labor College, with 188 students.<sup>62</sup>

The Sixth Congress of ORIT adopted a resolution stating, "In the light of the satisfactory experience of the ORIT-ICFTU Inter American Labor College, it follows that the ORIT affiliates, the ICFTU, and other agencies involved, should be exhorted to speed up the construction of the college and the pursuit of the College's functions in its own building, in accordance with the plans already approved."<sup>63</sup>

Various steps were taken to acquire the financial and other resources for the acquisition of its own building by the college. On the initiative of the students of the fourth course in the Inter-American Labor College in August-September 1963, a campaign was started to provide "A Brick for the ORIT Labor College" from among the rank and file of the ORIT affiliates, and effort that raised about \$30,000.<sup>64</sup> The governor of the state of Morelos, with legislative authorization, granted an area of nearly 5,000 square meters in the state capital, Cuernavaca, on which to construct the college's building. Other smaller contributions were provided by the General Confederation of German Workers, the United Auto Workers, and the Israeli Histadrut.

However, the most substantial contribution for the construction of the college was a loan from the International Solidarity Fund of the ICFTU. This was for \$180,000, and upon its reception, construction of the building in Cuernavaca was begun. The cornerstone was laid on February 5, 1965, and the school was open for use by the first course to be held there in February 25, 1966.<sup>65</sup>

Once the school in Cuernavaca was established, it received, for a number of years, a substantial subsidy from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. The ICFTU International Solidarity Fund provided some \$100,000 a year for the school.<sup>66</sup>

The Institute was formally inaugurated on April 11, 1966. It included classrooms, a large auditorium, and 15 dormitory rooms, each for three students. It also had dining facilities, a swimming pool, and a library, which began with 3,000 books, but subsequently expanded.

As originally conceived, the Cuernavaca Institute was "in a not too distant future" to become the first Inter-American Labor University, "designed to form experts in labor legislation and jurisprudence; labor economists and sociologists; cooperativists trained in the organization and operation of cooperatives, technicians in social security . . . and finally, specialists at the service of the trade union movement so that it will better

serve the interests of the working class, the community, the country and the whole continent."<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, these aspirations were not to be fulfilled.

However, with the establishment of the school in Cuernavaca, the educational activities of ORIT for a while expanded substantially. A considerable variety of courses, seminars, and conferences were held at the Cuernavaca site. There were, for example, several courses for trade union educators to prepare them for conducting their courses in their own countries, with 25 to 30 such educators participating in each course, as well as a Conference of ORIT Directors and Experts in Trade Union Education.

In October and November 1967 the First Inter-American Seminar-Conference on the Problems of Peasants and Agricultural Workers was held in Cuernavaca. A second such course met in July-August 1968. In June-July 1968 there was a specialized course in the problems of Latin American development and integration, followed in November 1968 by a seminar on trade union participation in economic and social development.

Joint seminars were run at Cuernavaca between ORIT and some of the International Trade Secretariats. For instance, there was one in January-February 1969 with the Inter-American Textile and Garment Workers' Federation, and another at the end of February 1969 with the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers. There were also special seminars for women trade unionists and young trade union leaders.

The ORIT school in Cuernavaca was also used by some of the Mexican unions of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México for their leadership training courses and seminars.

However, the ORIT training and education was not confined to the Cuernavaca school during this period. For instance, a seminar on Latin American integration was held in Valparaíso, Chile, in August 1965, under joint sponsorship of ORIT-ICFTU, the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), and the Maritime Workers Confederation of Chile,<sup>68</sup> and a seminar on trade union participation in economic and social development and integration of Latin America met in Quito, Ecuador, in February 1969.<sup>69</sup>

## ORIT AND THE AIFLD

During the 1960s there arose the issue of what was to be the relationship between the leadership training and education work of ORIT and that of the AIFLD, established in 1962 by the AFL-CIO. Although at the beginning at least there was obviously an effort on both sides to have their work be complementary, the end result of having both organizations engage basically in the same kind of effort in labor education and training proved detrimental to ORIT's activities of that kind.

The AIFLD was largely the brainchild of Serafino Romualdi, the long-time Latin American representative of the AFL (and subsequently of the AFL-CIO), who had played a major role in the establishment of ORIT and

of its predecessor, CIT. He resigned his posts in the AFL-CIO and as assistant secretary of ORIT in 1961.<sup>70</sup> Not long afterward he and other AFL-CIO officials involved in work in the inter-American labor movement developed the idea of the AIFLD as an organization to conduct leadership training and education in unions affiliated with ORIT on an unprecedented scale, as well as to help found and finance social projects such as cooperatives and workers' housing developments established by the Latin American and Caribbean unions, with which the AIFLD would be working.

The details of the development of the AIFLD are dealt with in another part of the present work. Here we are concerned only with the impact of the AIFLD on the education and training efforts of ORIT.

In its report to the Seventh Congress of the ORIT in March 1970, the Secretariat wrote:

Since its inception in 1962, the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) has collaborated with ORIT and its affiliates in the Hemisphere in programs of trade union education... this collaboration has been markedly expanded, not only in a greater number of educational events in which they have participated but also in aspects such as the assistance granted by the AIFLD for trade union courses of the ICFTU-ORIT Inter-American Labor College and of the affiliated organizations, in the improvement of the study programs for these courses and in the creation of trade union training schools—or the consolidation of existing ones—in charge of the affiliated confederations.

The ORIT Secretariat concluded, "Through ups and downs, mainly originated in the common desire to serve the workers' interests in a more effective way, this cooperation ORIT-AIFLD is being perfected."<sup>71</sup>

Arturo Jáuregui, the secretary-general of ORIT, told me in 1963 that relations between the ORIT and the AIFLD were "good." He was a member of the Board of the Institute, and seemed to feel that his word and opinions bore considerable weight in its deliberations.<sup>72</sup> Five years later, he was supporting the notion of establishing national Institutes for Free Labor Development, as a means of deflecting criticisms of the AIFLD that it was too closely tied to the U.S. government and with employers. These national IFLDs would collaborate with the AIFLD, not compete with it.<sup>73</sup> They were never established.

In its report to ORIT's Seventh Congress in 1970, the Secretariat emphasized over and over again the cooperative relationship between ORIT and the AIFLD, both in individual Latin countries and in the Inter-American Labor College in Cuernavaca. This relationship was pictured as a partnership, which perhaps it was, or appeared to be, during the first few years in which both ORIT and AIFLD were engaging in the leadership training effort.

However, the partnership between ORIT and AIFLD in this field was a very unequal one, particularly in financial terms. A study by the staff of

the Committee on Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate in 1968 spelled out this inequality.

The Senate Report commented:

Since the advent of the AIFLD at the beginning of the Alliance [for Progress] period, the ORIT has grown weaker, if for no other reason that AIFLD has the kind of financial support that permits it to preempt the ORIT in any given technical assistance field. Indeed there is no comparison between the financial backing available to the two organizations. According to the Department of State, ORIT's budget throughout the past six years has been maintained annually at roughly \$323,000; AIFLD's budget has grown from \$640,000 in 1962 to an estimated \$4,875,000 in 1967. Thus the financial strength of the AIFLD allows it to involve itself in the Latin American labor movement on a scale clearly unapproachable by the ORIT.<sup>74</sup>

That ORIT's overall position had grown weaker during the early years of the existence of the AIFLD is open to dispute. However, there is little doubt that even in the 1960s, the AIFLD had begun to preempt one of the major fields with which ORIT had been concerned since its inception, that of leadership training and education.

The existence of the AIFLD also probably contributed to the demise of the Inter-American Labor College in Cuernavaca, Mexico, since it established its own highest level of training, first in Washington, DC, and then in Front Royal, Virginia, to which union leaders from all over Latin America and the Caribbean were brought to more specialized kinds of work, somewhat similar to that offered in Cuernavaca.

However, more important in the demise of the Cuernavaca school was the quarrel in the 1970s between the AFL-CIO and the ICFTU that brought about the temporary withdrawal of the U.S. organization from the ICFTU, a quarrel in which Arturo Jáuregui, as secretary-general of ORIT, generally sided with the AFL-CIO. One result of this was that the ICFTU leadership, which was paying most of the cost of running the Cuernavaca school, demanded the replacement of Jáuregui as its director by a Mexican.

As a result of this change, the Inter-American Labor College ceased to exist. By 1974, ORIT was no longer able to hold any courses, seminars or other meetings there. The treasurer of ORIT opined in July 1975 that the Cuernavaca school had in fact become "a resort hotel for the CTM labor leaders."<sup>75</sup>

## ORIT ORGANIZATION WORK IN THE 1960s

A variety of organizational activities were from the beginning one of the objectives and activities of ORIT. The nature of these activities was sketched in the Secretariat's Report to the Sixth Congress:

Their main objective was to give our affiliated and member unions a more coherent organic structure, thereby increasing the number of workers incorporated in



free and democratic union systems. We have continued to encourage all labor organizations that compromise ORIT to develop and flourish by their own means, thus eliminating the subsidies that were granted in the past to our affiliates for basic tasks. Another purpose was to achieve the effective unity of Continental democratic trade unionism so as to be able to face the difficulties and thus better respond to the provocations of our adversaries.<sup>76</sup>

The ORIT organizers were drawn from a variety of sources. We have earlier noted that in the 1950s a number of these were exiled trade union leaders from Peru and Venezuela. Subsequently, this tradition was followed, with some exiled unionists from Paraguay and Cuba (among others) serving in this capacity. In other cases, the organizers were people nominated by one or another of ORIT's affiliates. In some instances, organizers were chosen to work within their own country.<sup>77</sup>

In 1964, the ORIT had 15 international organizers, of whom one was Mexican, four Cubans, two Paraguayans, four Colombians, one Honduran, two Peruvians and one Uruguayan. In addition, "the national centres have organizers assigned for organizational purposes" working in El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, British Guiana, Colombia, and Ecuador.<sup>78</sup>

Arturo Jáuregui described the activities of the ORIT organizers. He said:

Their tasks are multitudinous. For example, an ORIT field representative is expected to assist in specific organization tasks such as the merger of small unions organised on a factory basis, the creation of regional and industrial federations and guiding the campaigns of the labour centres to organise the unorganised. They are also expected to be educators—arranging week-end rural conferences and long-term national seminars, and participating as instructors in the established training programs of the local affiliate. . . . Publicity and promotion materials are initiated where none exist, and strengthened and modernized where already established. ORIT representatives frequently are requested to intervene in collective bargaining negotiations and settlement of strikes. They are expected to give direction to co-operative movements in their region, assist the International Trade Secretariats in joint activities and represent ORIT before national government and inter-governmental agencies.<sup>79</sup>

Joviano de Araújo, for a number of years the ORIT representative in Brazil, and a former leader of that country's maritime workers, was faced with the need for a different kind of organizing. The situation giving rise to the kind of "organizing" that Araújo became engaged in was (inadvertently) spelled out in the ORIT Secretariat's Report to the Sixth Congress.

The Secretariat noted:

Directly or indirectly, the Government constitutes a decisive factor in Brazilian trade union life. Through the Department of Labor, the Brazilian government

supervises union elections. With representatives of labor and employers' groups, the Department of Labor also administers the 'imposto sindical' ... a tax made up of contributions of one day's salary per year from each employee.... The controversies arising from this involvement have led ORIT-ICFTU on various occasions to express the opinion that it is advisable to revise the structure of Brazilian social legislation in accordance with the international precepts that guarantee union liberty without government administrative interference.<sup>80</sup>

This "administrative interference" included the state's determination of what kind of labor organizations could exist. It forbade all central labor organizations, on a national, state, or local basis. The highest level of organization permitted was a series of sectoral "confederations" of workers in industry, commerce, maritime trades, land transport, and several others. In a number of cases, the officers of these confederations owed their posts more to the support of the Ministry of Labor than to the backing of the rank and file of their affiliated organizations, and in at least some cases they had little or no contact with that rank and file.<sup>81</sup>

Joviano de Araújo sought to alter the situation at least to some degree. On the one hand, he carried out an extensive campaign, through literature distribution, and personal contacts with local unions belonging to the various ORIT-affiliated confederations, to inform the Brazilian unionists about ORIT, its purposes and functions. He also undertook activities that the confederation leaders should have done but did not do, such as presenting problems of local unions to the Ministry of Labor and even, on occasion, to the president. He established contacts with local union officials and if possible, even some contact with the ordinary members of these locals.<sup>82</sup>

## ORIT "OUTREACH" ORIENTATION

During the 1960s, ORIT was particularly active in presenting the point of view and interests of organized labor in a wider field than just direct labor-management relations and collective bargaining. To some degree, this kind of activity was stimulated by the Alliance for Progress, which President John Kennedy launched at the beginning of his administration.

From the inception of the Alliance for Progress, ORIT indicated its support for it. The Report of the Secretariat to the 1965 Congress of ORIT noted: "From the moment that the Alliance for Progress program was made known, the ORIT and its affiliates have been extending effective and ever more ample support to that program, in order to contribute to the achievement of the goals which it proposes to attain: the elimination of poverty, of ignorance, of disease and of oppression in Latin America; goals which are precisely the same ones which the Inter-American free trade union movement has been fighting to attain during all of the seventeen years of existence."

ORIT sent a delegation to lobby the government representatives participating in the conference in Punta del Este, Uruguay in August 1961 that formally established the Alliance for Progress. As the Secretariat's 1965 report said:

The thesis expounded by the ORIT at the Punta del Este conference, and which it has been maintaining in practice in recent years can be expressed as follows: on the one hand, to demand that the trade unionists be given an increasing responsibility in the planning and execution of Alliance programs at national, regional and hemispheric levels; and on the other hand, to train workers in general and especially their leaders, so that they may be in a position to contribute to the solution of the economic and social problems faced by their respective countries. The ORIT has advanced along this road and has achieved undeniable success, for the representatives of the highest organizations at the hemispheric level have recognized that the presence and the action of the workers is indispensable for the success of the Punta del Este Charter program in its execution and in the attainment of the goals of economic, social and political integration on a hemispheric-wide scale.<sup>83</sup>

To continue this kind of reaching beyond the strict confines of the labor movement, the Fifth Congress of ORIT, which met in August 1961, almost simultaneously with the Punta del Este meeting, set up the Economic and Social Department. It became very active in the years that followed.

ORIT delegations were sent to a variety of meetings connected with the Alliance for Progress and more generally with the economic and social problems of Latin America. These included meetings of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council (CIES), the part of the Organization of American States originally charged with carrying out the Alliance program, in Mexico City in October 1962, São Paulo, Brazil in November 1963, and December 1964 in Lima, Peru; meetings of a Special Committee for Labor Affairs of the CIES in Lima in February 1964, and in Buenos Aires in October 1964. There were also ORIT representatives present at meetings of the Economic Commission for Latin America.

Of special significance for ORIT were meetings of the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor, the first of which met in Bogotá, Colombia in May 1963, where it adopted what was known as the "Declaration of Cundinamarca." This "constituted a coordination of labor policy, action of the Labor Ministries and the trade unions in development programs, and the construction of instruments, such as cooperatives and workers' banks, which can serve to solve many problems affecting the workers of the hemisphere."

ORIT sent delegations to all of these meetings, as well as to a variety of others of a similar nature dealing with the economic and social problems of the hemisphere. These delegations submitted suggestions to the official delegates, and in some cases were given the floor to offer their opinions and suggestions.<sup>84</sup>

The Secretariat's Report to the Seventh Congress of ORIT in March 1970 said: "During the past five years since the VI Congress, the ORIT staff and that of our affiliates exerted every effort to attend all meetings of the international agencies connected in some way with the economic and social development of the Latin American countries." It added, "During the period, we have seen the affiliated organizations making every effort to establish their own institution or department of economic and social affairs, and we have helped them, where possible."

The kinds of sessions attended by ORIT delegations varied widely. They included meetings of the ministers of labor of the countries participating in the Alliance for Progress, meetings of the Inter-American Development Bank, and of the United Nations. They even included a meeting of the Latin American faculties and schools of economics and a meeting of the foreign ministers of the countries participating in the Latin American Free Trade Area (LAFTA).<sup>85</sup>

## **TWO INTER-AMERICAN TRADE UNION ECONOMIC CONFERENCES**

Clear indications of the outreach approach of ORIT under Arturo Jáuregui's leadership during the 1960s were the two trade union economic conferences it organized during this period. The first met in São Paulo, Brazil in August 1961, the second in Cuernavaca, Mexico in January 1967. Both were attended by delegates from the various ORIT affiliates and some representatives of International Trade Secretariats. But in addition, there were also present at the first meeting representatives of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Inter-American Development Bank, and at the second representatives not only of the ECLA and IDB but also from the Organization of American States, International Labor Organization, Food and Agricultural Organization, the Inter-American Planning Society and the Organization of Cooperatives of America.

The ORIT's own publication about the first of these conferences expounded on the function of both of them, as seen by the leadership of the organization. It said:

For the first time in the history of the labor movement of the Americas, its representatives met...to examine questions with regard to the material well being of our countries, the social and cultural future of their peoples, and continental peace and harmony. The free unions of this Hemisphere have thus demonstrated their maturity and their decision to face up to their responsibilities not only before their members, but also of all of the Latin American peoples, as a determining factor of modern Inter-American society....Free trade unionism of America opens up thus a new phase of activity, the results of which will be to accelerate the consolidation of the Inter-American economy and, in general terms, gain for the community of nations of this part of the Western Hemisphere a better material, cultural and moral future.<sup>86</sup>

A general document adopted by the First Inter-American Economic Conference commented that it was no longer enough for the labor movement to fight for its right to organize, and for higher wages and shorter working days. It argued that "[a]ll this, however, is not sufficient to really democratize the economy or invigorate it so that, without detriment to the legitimate rights of other sectors within it, there will disappear from our peoples and our societies misery, hunger, lack of housing, bad health conditions and ignorance.... For the manual and intellectual workers constitute within society not gregarious and subaltern multitudes but 'partners' of the representatives of capital and of governments. We have to train ourselves adequately, we must prepare our own economists and to take into consideration that, in addition to rights to demand and obtain, we have responsibilities and missions to fulfill."

The first conference dealt with a variety of issues. These included agrarian reform, the stabilization of markets and prices for the "basic products" made in Latin America, and the industrialization and diversification of the Latin American economies. It also dealt with the problem of investments necessary for development, noting that, between public and private investment, "the continental labor movement prefers the former," but recognized the need also for private investment, stressing the idea that everything possible should be done to get private investors to reinvest their profits in Latin American countries.

This first trade union economic conference expressed strong support for the Latin American Free Trade Association (ALALC), which had recently been established at a conference in Montevideo, but demanded that ORIT be recognized by ALALC "as the legitimate representative of the workers of the countries signing the Treaty of Montevideo." It urged that ALALC be the first step toward formation of a Latin American Common Market. It also urged the U.S. government to support not only the ALALC but its transformation into a common market, as it had supported the emerging European Common Market; and requested the U.S. members of ORIT to urge such a policy of their government. It also strongly supported the Central American Common Market that had recently been agreed to.<sup>87</sup>

The Second Inter-American Economic and Social Conference of ORIT also had representatives present from most of the affiliated organizations. There were also people present, with the right to speak but not to vote, from the ICFTU, the Organization of American States, International Labor Organization, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Inter-American Bank, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the Economic Commission for Latin America, the Organization of Central American States, and the European Coal and Steel Community.

This time the conference had as its general theme, "The Role of Free Trade Unionism in the Integration and Strengthening of Democracy in the Americas." The sessions were divided into two parts, the first being a series of panels and roundtables where representatives of the international

intergovernmental organizations discussed "The Role of Organized Workers, the Role of Peasants, and the Role of Intellectuals and the Press."

The second part of the meeting was its plenary session. The discussions were organized around the subjects of the Latin American Common Market, "Integral Agrarian Reform and its Application," "Central American Economic Integration," "The Program of the Alliance for Progress and its Present Status," and "Industrialization and Social Progress." "Conclusions" of the plenary were adopted on each of these subjects.<sup>88</sup>

## ORIT FINANCES

ORIT had its financial accounts audited both by an outside firm (Price Waterhouse) and an internal auditor, and the results of the audits and details of the organization's finances were reported to the ORIT congresses. This information was published in the official reports of the Secretariat to these congresses, so one can get a good idea of the ORIT's sources of funds and what it spent its income on during the 1960s.

The records for 1964 indicated that the organization received a total of \$367,195.80. Of this, \$85,186.40 came from affiliation dues, \$278,048 from the ICFTU, \$1,777.81 from sale of publications, and \$2,183.59 from "miscellaneous income."<sup>89</sup>

Of particular interest are the dues paid by the ORIT affiliates. By far, the largest item in this category in 1964 was the \$72,000 paid by the AFL-CIO. In that same year, the Canadian affiliate paid \$6,000. The largest dues payers in Latin America and the Caribbean were the Mexican CTM, whose dues obligation for 1964 was \$1,650, but had actually paid \$2,000, and the three Brazilian organizations that then belonged to the ORIT, which had paid \$1,500. The contribution of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú was \$250.

Although the CTV of Venezuela was supposed to pay \$350 for the year, it still owed \$150 by the year's end. In fact nonpayment of dues was obviously a problem of some consequence. Twelve of the 28 affiliates listed still owed all or part of their annual dues by the end of 1964.<sup>90</sup>

The ORIT's expenditures during 1964 were listed under six categories. These were administrative expenses, promotion expenses, future organization programs, an emergency fund, the Inter-American Labor College, and the ORIT Continental Congress preparations.

Administrative costs included salaries, expenditures to maintain the ORIT office, and office equipment, and amounted in all to \$112,652.37 in 1964. Promotion costs included "congresses, meetings and travel expenses," which came to \$33,492.08; production and distribution of publications, which cost \$35,940.28; and costs of education and local seminars, on which \$24,035.99 was spent. Organizational expenses consisted principally of payments to ORIT organizers in various areas, and accounted for \$110,756.68.

Finally, the emergency fund was \$5,546.37, expenditures on the Inter-American Labor College cost \$42,311.39, and preparations for the Sixth Congress of ORIT were \$1,916.78 by the end of 1964.<sup>91</sup>

Interesting changes in ORIT finances had occurred by the time of the Secretariat Report to the Seventh Congress. Particularly noticeable was the sharp drop of income from the ICFTU, which had fallen to \$99,832.34 in 1969, compared to almost three times that much in 1964. As a result of this, in 1960 affiliation dues were slightly larger than the ICFTU contributions to ORIT. The total income of ORIT had fallen by more than a third since 1964.

As before, the U.S. and Canadian affiliates were the largest contributors of dues payments, \$72,000 and \$6,000 respectively. The contributions of the Mexican CTM and the Brazilian affiliates increased substantially, rising to \$4,801.84 and \$4,000 respectively. Nine affiliates had not paid all (or any) of their dues, leaving a shortfall of \$5,215 in budgeted dues payments. Most notably, the CTV of Venezuela had not yet paid any of the \$1,700 dues that it owed.<sup>92</sup>

Expenditures of ORIT in 1969 were largely for the same things as they had been in 1964. Organizational expenses varied principally in where they were concentrated, Central America generally getting more attention than previously. Salary and travel payments took up a large part of the total, as had been the case before.<sup>93</sup>

## ORIT AND THE ICFTU

ORIT was founded as a regional branch of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. Official invitations to its founding congress were issued by the ICFTU. Leading figures in the worldwide group attended the founding meeting and subsequent congresses of ORIT and played a more or less active role in those proceedings. As we have seen, a substantial part of the financing of ORIT during its first two decades came from its "mother" organization.

However, in spite of this apparently close association between ORIT and the ICFTU, actual relations between the two organizations were sometimes very strained. At the center of conflict were at least two issues: the status of ORIT as a subordinate branch of the ICFTU, and conflicts between the ICFTU's largely European leadership and that of the AFL-CIO, particularly its old AFL segment, headed by AFL-CIO President George Meany.

Problems between ORIT and the ICFTU started at least as early as 1955. According to Luis Alberto Monge, who was then ORIT secretary-general, the ICFTU leadership realized by the ORIT Second Congress in San José, Costa Rica, that ORIT was developing considerable importance in the Western Hemisphere and had become "something worth controlling." They also became distressed at the evident influence that the AFL-CIO



had within the ORIT, and became determined to try to minimize if not destroy that influence.

Monge felt that this conflict was by 1959 threatening the very existence of ORIT. It had been largely responsible, as we have noted, for ORIT's failure to denounce strongly the Batista dictatorship in Cuba, which had weakened the position of ORIT as spokesman for the "free labor movement."<sup>94</sup>

Serafino Romualdi, in an article entitled "ORIT at the Crossroads," wrote about the uneasy relations between ORIT and the ICFTU in the late 1950s. Commenting on a meeting between a subcommittee of the ORIT Executive Board and Charles Millard, the director of organization of the ICFTU in Mexico City in February 1953, he said that meeting "had laid the groundwork for a firm understanding with the headquarters of the parent organization—the ICFTU—for closer contact and coordination in conducting organizational activities in the whole territory under the jurisdiction of the ORIT."

Romualdi said that such a meeting and agreement were necessary because ORIT was quite different from the ICFTU regional groupings in Asia and Africa. It was "self-supporting, at least as far as personnel and basic organizational structure are concerned." Furthermore, "ORIT predates, in fact, the organization of the ICFTU itself," since most ORIT affiliates had belonged to CIT, which "had, for all intents and purposes the same scope as ORIT, and it was voluntarily dissolved the day after the ORIT was launched."

Because of these circumstances, Romualdi said "it was therefore, somewhat inevitable that some misunderstanding with the ORIT would arise from time to time." However, he argued, since both organizations "have had years of experience to draw upon, it has finally been possible to work out a formula by which operational and educational activities would be coordinated so that there would be no overlapping and above all, no danger of making it appear that the two organizations were competing rather than being one in purpose and fact."<sup>95</sup>

ORIT survived that crisis and during most of the 1960s, under the leadership of Arturo Jáuregui, continued to be the largest and most influential regional labor group in the Western Hemisphere. It was not until 1968 that an event occurred which brought the continued existence of ORIT into question.

In 1968 the differences of opinion and policy between the European leadership of the ICFTU and the leadership of the AFL-CIO brought the latter to withdraw their organization from the International Confederation, and the AFL-CIO did not return to the ICFTU until 1982.<sup>96</sup> However, when the AFL-CIO left the ICFTU, it did not withdraw from ORIT, which was, in theory at least, a branch of the ICFTU. As Raúl Valdivia, then sub-secretary of ORIT, said in 1971, since the AFL-CIO withdrawal from the ICFTU was seen as being "temporary," the "technical question" of the AFL-CIO withdrawal from the ICFTU was seen as being "temporary;"

the "technical question" of the AFL-CIO's continuing to be an affiliate of ORIT although not a member of the parent body was "overlooked."<sup>97</sup>

However, this strange situation brought into question whether ORIT itself would continue to exist, and if so, in what form. There were pressures brought to bear on the situation from many quarters, including the ICFTU, the AFL-CIO, and the governments and trade union leaderships of some of the Latin American labor organizations that belonged to ORIT.

One early victim of this situation was the Inter-American Labor College in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Regarding Arturo Jáuregui, the first head of the school, as being too pro-AFL-CIO, the ICFTU, which had largely financed the school, demanded his removal from the school administration and his replacement by a Mexican.<sup>98</sup> We have already noted the decline and virtual elimination of the college after Jáuregui's removal.

Jáuregui was caught in a difficult situation. Regarded by the ICFTU (and even some of his Latin American friends) as too "pro-Yankee," Jáuregui nevertheless had considerable difficulties with the AFL-CIO after the retirement of Serafino Romualdi as the AFL-CIO's Latin American representative and his replacement by Andrew McClellan. Unlike Romualdi, McClellan was convinced that the Latin American labor movements ought to be non-political. Given the fact that virtually all of the significant labor groups of the region had political party associations, McClellan's position caused clashes with Jáuregui and other ORIT leaders.<sup>99</sup> McClellan finally made it clear that he wanted to have Jáuregui removed from the leadership of ORIT.<sup>100</sup>

All of these problems created a certain atmosphere of crisis at the time of the Eighth Congress of ORIT in January 1974. This crisis was both financial and political. The ORIT budget was showing a \$130,000 deficit, undoubtedly reflecting the withdrawal of ICFTU support. At the same time, the AFL-CIO was threatening to withdraw from ORIT if major changes were not made in both the constitution and leadership of the organization.

The major constitutional change demanded by the AFL-CIO was that the position of treasurer of ORIT be established, and that there be a tacit agreement that this post would be given to someone from the AFL-CIO. The principal personnel change demanded by the AFL-CIO was the retirement of Arturo Jáuregui as secretary-general, and his replacement by Julio Etcheverry, a Paraguayan exile unionist who for several years had been on the organizational staffs of ORIT and the AIFLD.

The AFL-CIO got its way at the Eighth Congress on both counts. Following the Congress, the financial crisis was largely resolved, although this involved a substantial reduction in the personnel of ORIT, with a resulting decrease in what it would undertake. However, a serious political crisis remained—uncertainty as to whether the ORIT would in fact continue to exist very much longer.<sup>101</sup>

At a meeting of the Executive Board of the ICFTU early in 1975 the issue of what would become of ORIT was a major item on the agenda.

Two proposals were presented: the representative of the Danish trade unions proposed that ORIT be dissolved as of July 4, 1975 and receivership be established to liquidate it. The second suggestion, by ICFTU Secretary-General Kersten, was that a committee of the ICFTU be established to discuss and decide what should happen to the inter-American regional organization. The Danish proposal was defeated, but over the objections of ORIT Secretary-General Etcheverry, the second one was adopted, including the provision that representatives of the Asian and African branches of the ICFTU be included on the new committee.

One matter of rather bitter dispute between the ORIT leaders and those of the ICFTU was the latter's favorable treatment of some Latin American Communist trade union leaders, particularly Communist officials of the Chilean Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile (CUTCh) exiled after the fall of the Allende regime in September 1973. When ORIT Secretary-General Julio Etcheverry arrived at the ICFTU headquarters in Brussels early in 1975 he found that Luis Figueroa, the Communist ex-deputy who was secretary-general of the CUTCh, was installed in an office in the ICFTU headquarters. Also, ICFTU officials urged Etcheverry to work out with Figueroa and his colleagues the summoning of a conference in Chile of Latin American trade unionists of all political orientations. This Etcheverry refused to do, and protested to the ICFTU officials that they were supporting the Communists in the Latin American labor movements rather than those elements that were supposedly aligned ideologically and politically with the ICFTU and what it stood for. Etcheverry said that the ICFTU officials treated him, the secretary-general of one of the ICFTU's regional organizations, as an outsider, and the Communist trade unionists as if they were part of the ICFTU.

Both Julio Etcheverry and Arturo Jáuregui interpreted the sympathy of the ICFTU leaders to Latin American Communist trade unionists to the influence of the Socialist International with which most of the European ICFTU leaders were affiliated. Etcheverry and Jáuregui reasoned that the Socialist International was at that time, particularly under the influence of the German Social Democrats, seeking a kind of *détente* with the Communists. They added that these Europeans obviously knew very little about the labor movements of Latin America.

Meanwhile, the ICFTU leaders, according to Etcheverry and Jáuregui, were doing what they could to undermine ORIT. They were encouraging the idea that had been tentatively put forward by leaders of the Venezuelan CTV to reorganize ORIT as a purely Latin American organization, which might include not only its Latin American affiliates, but also the Christian and Communist-controlled elements in Latin American organized labor. They even were going so far as to suggest that the West Indian affiliates of ORIT might break away the Caribbean Congress of Labor, ORIT's sub-regional grouping, to become an independent organization affiliated directly with the ICFTU.<sup>102</sup>

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## CHAPTER 8

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# The Reorientation of ORIT

The official history of the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT), published in 1991, described what was seen by many people within the organization to be the lamentable situation in which it found itself by the late 1970s:

[T]he organization bore a heavy load of delegitimization in trade union circles, principally because it had been misused or had not served the interests of the workers. The leaders and the ideas with which it was identified were discredited. Among the affiliates themselves there was resistance or indifference. Some organizations belonged to the ORIT perhaps because there was no other international organization to which they could belong, but the ORIT was not living up to their expectations. But in other trade union sectors, particularly the central labor groups which had maintained an independent position but had a democratic orientation, their leaders sensed a profound change in world and regional conditions, and looked for a new space.<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1970s, a movement developed to change this situation.

### BEGINNINGS OF ORIT REORIENTATION

Beginning in the late 1970s ORIT began to undergo a significant reorientation. The official history described this as “a strong internal convulsion, in the process of which some progressive sectors took the initiative of removing from the regional organization what has been called the ‘ideological lack of definition’ of the previous period.”<sup>2</sup>

The change within ORIT began with the election of Juan José Delpino of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela as secretary-general at the Ninth Congress in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 1977. The change of direction was confirmed by the Tenth Congress that met in Toronto, Canada, in 1981.

ORIT history attributed this change in large part to the fact that the Socialist International, under the leadership of Willy Brandt, began to show interest in developing countries, and particularly in Latin America. Most of the European labor movements, which largely dominated the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), were led by people belonging to parties of the Socialist International.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the ICFTU participated in bringing about the change in the orientation of ORIT, in collaboration with Delpino and other members of the leadership of ORIT itself.

In 1977 and 1978, there was "veritable offensive of joint missions of the ICFTU and ORIT to various parts of Latin America." These missions consisted of the secretary-general of ORIT and the head of the Latin American Department of the ICFTU and two other people. They had various purposes. They were designed "to change the image of the ORIT, to return to closer relations with the ICFTU, because in some sectors of the labor movement it appeared as an isolated continental organization under the decisive influence of the AFL-CIO." Also, the official ORIT history said that "it was necessary that the ORIT be recognized as democratic, but not just because it was anticommunist as at the time some leaders of affiliated organizations saw it."<sup>4</sup>

The missions not only visited the various affiliates of ORIT, but also contacted other labor organizations that did not belong to it, but were democratic in orientation, "thus initiating a promise phase of unity of action in the struggle for common objectives of political democracy and social justice." The official ORIT history claimed, "The missions were converted... to a large degree into a means for uniting the positions of different Latin American sectors, European and North American unionism."<sup>5</sup>

The ICFTU, aside from participating in the missions to various Latin American countries, took other steps to improve its relations with ORIT and its affiliates. Its Secretariat's Report to its congress in Madrid in 1979 noted the ICFTU's own lack of sufficient interest in ORIT. It observed that only the American Institute of Free Labor Development and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of West Germany "have represented free trade union solidarity in the form of institutions financed by their respective governments, whose activities have seemed conditioned by the 'reasons of state' that still determine relations among countries." The resolution continued that "until now we have been seen as limiting ourselves to discussing the initiatives that these institutions have or have not taken instead of examining the forms in which a better kind of international trade union solidarity might be carried on to aid our affiliates in these parts of the

world in their efforts to assure freedom and democracy as well as the welfare of the workers."

The ICFTU Secretariat's Report then commented that ICFTU activities in America must be carried on in close collaboration with ORIT, "our regional organization that loyally reflects the situation of the affiliates of the ICFTU in that part of the world, with all of its problems and difficulties, including the consequences of the insufficient presence of the ICFTU. Furthermore, ORIT suffers from the fact the AFL-CIO, which formerly was its largest affiliate, has retired from the ICFTU."

This report also noted that "the new leaders of our regional organization, the ORIT, have demonstrated an interest and enthusiasm in the struggle for freedom, democracy and effective integration of our affiliated organizations in Latin America in the free and democratic trade union family."<sup>6</sup>

The ICFTU also apparently sought to remove one important factor that had disturbed its relations with the ORIT when it converted the ICFTU-CUT of Chile Committee (about which ORIT Secretary-General Etcheverry had protested to me), into the ICFTU Committee for Defense of Human and Trade Union Rights in Latin America.<sup>7</sup>

Several European affiliates of the ICFTU established programs to help the trade union movements in certain Latin American countries, particularly Chile and Brazil, then still suffering from oppressive dictatorships. The official ORIT history commented, "If these bilateral relations expressed the distancing that had been produced between the European affiliates of the ICFTU and the continental organism, it is also true that in the process they helped bring about a change in the view of the ORIT in trade union sectors with which it could not have contact at that moment."

The official history said that these contributions from European union groups should be seen as temporary and decreasing over time, comparing them to the financial aid that the AFL-CIO had given to European democratic unions during the period of the Marshall Plan.<sup>8</sup>

During this period, the ICFTU took another step of importance to ORIT. It expelled four of its Latin American affiliates, those of Paraguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Uruguay, because of too close association with undemocratic regimes then in power in their respective countries. Subsequently, new affiliates were admitted in El Salvador and Guatemala.<sup>9</sup> Expulsion from the ICFTU resulted in the organizations also ceasing to be members of the ORIT.

## THE TENTH CONGRESS OF ORIT

ORIT's Tenth Congress, which met in Toronto, Canada in 1981, strongly reflected the reorientation of the organization, which according to the official ORIT history, was "principally impelled by the [Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela] CTV of Venezuela and the CLC [Canadian Labor Congress] of Canada."<sup>10</sup> This congress was presided over

by D. McDermott, the president of the Canadian Labor Congress, and opened with greetings from ICFTU Secretary-General Otto Kersten, who "congratulated the new leaders of the ORIT for having made it possible for the policy of the regional group to be adjusted to that of the ICFTU, thus presenting a more coherent image." Kersten also announced that the AFL-CIO was considering returning to the ICFTU,<sup>11</sup> which it did a few months later.

Two documents of particular importance were adopted at the Tenth Congress. One, which was introduced by the Venezuelan delegation, dealt with certain "misunderstandings" that had made ORIT suffer "a deterioration over a period of several years." One of these misunderstandings was the belief that the labor movement should be "apolitical." On the contrary, the resolution maintained, "any authentically free and democratic labor movement must have a firm political position, since "except in a free and democratic society trade union freedom and social justice cannot survive." Furthermore, "political agnosticism" had brought some ORIT-ICFTU affiliates, "whether by their own free will or not, to connive with regimes and interests that by their own nature were against the interests of the workers," and so had been expelled from ICFTU and ORIT.<sup>12</sup>

Another misunderstanding, according to this resolution, was the idea that the principal task of all free and democratic labor movements was to struggle against Communism and Communist institutions." Although such a labor movement must always oppose the Communists, it must remember that "we are not democrats because we are anti-Communists; we are anti-Communists because we are democrats." The principal task of the democratic labor movement was "to struggle for authentic social justice without which no country and no regime can define itself as democratic."<sup>13</sup>

A third misunderstanding concerned the nature of international labor solidarity. The resolution noted that a mistaken argument often made in favor of such solidarity was that the Communists received very extensive aid from their backers, thus stimulating the idea that "the force of the free and democratic trade union movement in Latin America depends in large part, if not exclusively, on the magnitude of aid that is received from international solidarity." On the contrary, the function of international solidarity must be "to build authentic trade union organizations capable of carrying out their fundamental mission as authentic and independent organizations."

Consequently, international solidarity must conform to certain principles. First, it must come exclusively from the international labor movement, and not from "governments, businessmen or their corporations." It would only be "authentic" if such was the case, and if national union groups received aid from the ICFTU and ORIT. Such aid must also only be "temporary and extraordinary," and must be given to the organization receiving it based on plans drawn up by the organization receiving the aid.<sup>14</sup>

Probably the most important thing the Tenth Congress did was to provide "the political definition of ORIT." This document denounced the idea that ICFTU and ORIT were "apolitical." It noted that as the World Confederation of Labor was Social Christian, and the WFTU was "the executive arm of a trade unionism dominated by the USSR, working in the name of Marxist-Leninism," the ICFTU "is an international labor expression of a political creed, Social Democracy."

The document on the "political definition" of the ORIT went on to say that the claim that the AFL-CIO, the U.S. affiliate of ORIT, was "apolitical" was totally unjustified. It said, "when the AFL-CIO offers its support and its economic cooperation to a United States presidential candidate or a senator or representative who has been linked to the interests of the workers, this trade union group is engaged in politics in the best sense of the word. And when the AFL-CIO demands a boycott of the dictatorship suffered by Chile or declares solidarity with the Panamanian people in their national claims in the Panama Canal, or its sympathy for the nationalization of Venezuelan iron and petroleum, it is assuming a political position."

So, this statement of the political position of the ORIT concluded, "the thesis of labor apoliticism is false, is not in accord with reality and the only ones who support it are the political and economic oligarchies that seek a situation of weakness and political disinformation for the workers in order to dominate and exploit them to their own benefit... However, the interests of the labor movement, which has its own politics, must not be confused with the interests of those politicians who attempt to make the trade union organizations appendices of their parties."<sup>15</sup>

## RESISTANCE TO CHANGE IN ORIT

The effort to modify the orientation (and nature) of ORIT was not without opposition. The ORIT official history commented, "One can say that in the beginning there was great indifference in the majority of the organizations: passivity was the characteristic attitude. It was expected that ORIT would come, initiate the debate and present 'the line.' In truth, there were few affiliates that at that moment were in condition to participate intensely in the debate, as a result of factors related to a certain degree of stagnation, or of sharp internal contradictions, or of a certain distancing from the ORIT."

The history continued saying, "Some leaders and some affiliated central bodies had for years been characterized by another way of understanding and practicing trade unionism, very close perhaps to that of the AFL-CIO, and it was not necessarily a question of economic dependence of any other kind of subordination. It was really a way of thinking."

There was even some resistance to reorientation of ORIT from within its own highest organs. So, "acceptance of the new thesis was not immediate

or automatic, or accompanied by generalized applause. Certainly it was not an easy task."<sup>16</sup>

## ORIT REORIENTATION AND THE AFL-CIO

The official history of ORIT insisted that although "European trade unionism contributed to the change...it is mistake to interpret this process of renovation and reorientation of the ORIT in the period we are **discussing**, in terms of a confrontation and virtual rupture with the AFL-CIO. One must keep in mind that at the same time that the X Congress was being prepared and held, and that the ICFTU was pushing the changes in the regional organization, the United States central labor body was beginning the process of return to the world Confederation."

The ORIT history added, "Furthermore, there were and still are many links of solidarity between the AFL-CIO and the affiliated organizations that pushed the ideological turn of the ORIT. It is also notable that in the analysis and debates that centered on the X congress, the Interamerican character of the ORIT was never in doubt. Only outside of the ICFTU and of the ORIT, at certain times, was it suggested than an international organization including the trade unions of all the countries of the American continent was not feasible. But history itself, with each step, is repudiating this thesis."

The ORIT history concluded, "On this occasion the speculation that after the Congress of Toronto there would come a rupture in the regional organization was proven to be without basis in fact. Rather, the tradition was strengthened of a political process that permits advances, reforms and modernization, without loss of organic unity, the ties of solidarity or agreement on principles and objectives."<sup>17</sup>

## ORIT AFTER THE TENTH CONGRESS

It is true that there was no overt split in ORIT following its adoption, and subsequent confirmation at the Tenth Congress, of a substantially new orientation. However, the organization did experience a substantial crisis after that congress, which lasted for almost two years.

The official ORIT history noted, "The Secretariat suffered in the subsequent years great instability, which to some degree reflected the process of reconciliation of the tendencies and tensions within ORIT with respect to the application of the decisions of the X Congress.... The activity of the Secretariat had been practically paralyzed a little after the X Congress. The truth is that at the beginning of 1984, the ORIT was not carrying out any program in education, nor in the field of human rights and labor rights."<sup>18</sup>

One problem was that there was a rapid turnover of leadership of ORIT in the period following the Toronto Congress. It had reconfirmed Juan

José Delpino as secretary-general, but he resigned for health reasons at the end of 1981. Tulio Cuevas of the Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia was chosen acting secretary-general in January 1982, but he resigned at the end of 1983. It was not until the election of Luis Anderson, leader of the Confederación de Trabajadores de la República de Panamá (CTRP) by a meeting of the Executive Committee in November 1983 that some stability was restored to the leadership of ORIT.<sup>19</sup> Anderson was to continue in the top leadership of the ORIT for most of the rest of the 20th century.

The problem faced by Anderson was described by the ORIT history: "In spite of the fact that no progress was being carried out, there did exist the orientation given by X Congress, subsequently elaborated on in many studies, analyses and debates. It was necessary to move to carry it out in practice. This was very difficult, since the strongest resistance to the changes came when it was a question of passing from the theory to practice. Perhaps the inaction that existed at that time originated exactly from that resistance to change."<sup>20</sup>

Putting into practice the new orientation of ORIT was particularly notable in its education program, and in its reaction to the political and economic situation in which the Latin American and Caribbean labor movements found themselves at that time. In the former, a new intensified program of trade union leadership training moved away from concentrating almost exclusively on collective bargaining techniques and organizational management of the unions. Although those things were by no means abandoned, new emphasis was put on engendering "[a] political culture that makes it possible to understand clearly the values and fundamentals of social democracy. Only thus would it be possible to confront adversaries of whatever political or ideological orientation, consolidate leadership under the banner of democratic trade unionism."

The ORIT official history summed up this change in the focus of leadership training and education thus:

In synthesis, the new concentrations are designed to harmonize the education with the concrete realities faced by the workers of a country and of the region; based on permanent study of the surrounding reality and vigilance for changes that occur in the socio-economic situation, with the ultimate purpose of making democracy more profound, not in an abstract way, but on the basis of economic, social and political realities for which the education must have a defined political orientation. This political orientation takes into account the ethical responsibility that the labor organization and its leadership have toward its members and the country in general.<sup>21</sup>

In its struggle against dictatorship and the suppression of civil liberties and trade union rights, the ORIT leadership sought not only to support and mobilize its various national affiliates, but also to develop relations with other organization, both within organized labor and in general civil



society, which were struggling against dictatorial regimes. In Chile, they worked with the new trade union leadership that began to emerge in the early 1980s, in the struggle against the regime of General Augusto Pinochet. In Argentina, after the military coup of March 1976, they worked not only with the elected leaders of the Confederación General del Trabajo, which had recently joined the ICFTU, but with other unions and non-labor groups that also were also confronting the tyrannical armed forces dictatorship. In Brazil, ORIT not only maintained contact with the national labor confederations that were ORIT and ICFTU affiliates, but also strongly supported the new trade union movement that began to develop in the late 1970s, and which sought to create an organized labor movement freed from the system of government intervention and control that had prevailed there (to a greater or lesser degree) since the late 1930s.

In Central America, where armed conflicts existed in several of the countries, oppressive regimes prevailed, and union freedom was severely curtailed, ORIT consistently supported moves to end the military confrontations and to bring about the establishment of national regimes that would make a real labor movement possible.<sup>22</sup>

For instance, ORIT strongly supported the so-called Contadora Group, consisting of the governments of Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Mexico, which sought to act as a mediating force to bring an end to the armed conflicts in Central America. The Executive Committee of ORIT issued a statement that said, "We look with special interest at the diplomatic move begun a few months ago by the President of the Republic of Colombia, Sr. Belisario Betancur and then continued by the four ministers of foreign relations of the Contadora Group." The ORIT statement particularly welcomed the "essentially Latin Americanist nature" of the Contadora intervention, but then added that "it would undoubtedly have more legitimacy if it had the active participation of the Democratic Trade Union Movement of Latin America." Then, although saying that the movement "for the most part" was represented in ORIT, it went on to "issue a call to all Democratic Trade Union Organizations, democratic political parties to support the efforts carried on by the Contadora Group."<sup>23</sup> ORIT sought to get the cooperation of union groups belonging to the Social Christian hemispheric organization CLAT in developing labor support for and participation in the Contadora process.<sup>24</sup>

## CHANGES CONTINUED IN TWELFTH CONGRESS AND AFTER

The Twelfth Congress of ORIT in Caracas, Venezuela, in April 1989 reconfirmed the orientation of ORIT and its affiliates that had been set forth in the Tenth Congress eight years before. It reiterated the need for the inter-American labor movement to move away from its historic emphasis only

on collective bargaining and the struggle for political democracy, and to replace it with a "socio-political trade unionism."

According to the basic document adopted at the Twelfth Congress, the new "socio-political trade unionism" must present "a project of a New Society, the functioning and reason for existence of which is to function in the interest of the workers, the poor majority and other popular sectors that struggle for the improvement of our societies." The official ORIT history explained that such an orientation "is an effort to recover the necessary utopian energy at a time in which the revolutionary models of the XX Century have been discredited and the ideological triumph of neoliberalism seeks to impose a 'single thought' and the illusion of 'the end of history'."<sup>25</sup>

The document adopted at the Twelfth Congress "insisted on the urgency of establishing agreement that leads to joining the forces of the trade union movement with other social sectors and movements, such as youth, women, the peasantry, the environmentalist movement, the intellectuals, the workers of the informal sector and others."<sup>26</sup>

This document also, although dedicating itself principally to the situation and perspectives of the trade union movement in Latin America and the Caribbean, dealt with "the situation of trade unionism movement in the north of the continent, the United States and Canada. In spite of recognizing the great historical differences in situation and context, as well as in political and cultural problems and obstacles, once more in the history of ORIT there was affirmed the possibility of cooperation between the trade unionisms of the south and north of the continent."<sup>27</sup>

Right after the Twelfth Congress of ORIT there took place in Caracas an ORIT sponsored conference on "Difficulties and Challenges of Trade Unionism by the Year 2000," in which all "affiliated and fraternal organizations of the continent participated." That conference "made a great contribution to the trade union movement in terms of strategy and platform of action to make it possible for our societies to take the road toward sustained progress." To that end, it discussed, among other things, "Latin American integration, dynamic insertion in the world economy, protecting national sovereignty and autonomy, in implementing economic, social and political democracies in the region."

The ORIT history commented, "The general proposals drawn up at the Conference were directed at dealing with the great challenges of the end of the century: the social debt, the labor and economic transformations resulting from the rapid implementation of new technologies, and the application of neoliberal policies, which are bringing about crises in the conditions of life and work of the great majority in Latin America and the Caribbean."

Again, this conference, according to the official ORIT history, "called for the trade union movement to abandon the merely economic approach, adding a socio-political approach based on a larger space for participation

in the firm, in the definition of the principal elements of economic policy, and in the construction and strengthening of political democracy."

The conference also stressed the need for trade union leaders to be acquainted with the nature of the new technologies "for the purpose of formulating alternatives that favor the improvement of working and environmental conditions, and avoiding the reduction of labor front." It also stressed the need for giving bigger roles in organized labor to young people and women, and particularly for bringing the workers of the "informal" sector of the economy into the trade union movement, "paying attention to their specific conditions and assuming their representation in the struggle for an economic and social policy that benefits the informal sector and combats poverty."<sup>28</sup>

## ORIT AND THE LATIN AMERICAN ECONOMIC CRISIS

Inevitably, ORIT had to center much of its attention during the 1980s, popularly known as the lost decade, on the economic crisis that faced Latin America and the Caribbean during that period. Although the governments and political leaders dealt principally with the debt crisis, that is, the difficulty the Latin American countries encountered in paying the very large short-term debt that they had accumulated during the so-called oil crisis of the previous decade, the attention of ORIT, and of the national labor movements of all of the hemisphere, centered on the impact of this crisis on the working class, particularly the organized labor movement. The solutions to the debt problem imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, with the support of the U.S. government, required drastic cuts in government expenditures, particularly for social programs, freezing of wages in the face of rapidly rising prices, and a virtual ending (at least for the time being) to collective bargaining.

In August 1984, ORIT held a conference on "New Views of the Economic Crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean" which, according to the official history of ORIT was "the first meeting dedicated to the problem of the foreign debt crisis that was conducted by trade unionism in any part of the world." There Secretary-General Luis Anderson "insisted on the old aspiration of the ORIT to have the unions and the inter-American organization put forth their own political personality, which some governments and the financial technicians and experts did not want to recognize."<sup>29</sup>

The Eleventh Congress of ORIT, which took place in Mexico in April 1985, also centered much of its attention on the "debt crisis." The ORIT history noted:

The Commission of the Congress charged with this specific question underscored that, with there being moratoria in the payment of the debt of some countries, in case of failure of negotiations for a refinancing to provide longer terms, reduction

of interest rates, of periods of no payment, etc., the only way out for our countries may be generalized moratorium, since the only alternative would be saving the creditor banks or rescuing the population of Latin America. The resolution finally adopted on the subject called for 'an automatic postponement of the debts to provide a reasonable period of grace in which the countries devote their resources to recuperation of their economies with the internal investment necessary to be able to pay later.'<sup>30</sup>

ORIT continued to pay attention to the debt crisis problem. Secretary-General Anderson participated in a meeting that the ICFTU had with officials of the IMF and World Bank. Shortly after this, ORIT presented a paper on "Consequences for the Workers of the Economic Crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean" to the Twenty-first Conference of the Economic Commission for Latin America.

Then in September 1986 ORIT organized a conference on "Foreign Debt and Economic Crisis" in Buenos Aires. This conference "established that covering the social debt of our countries has priority over payment of the foreign debt," adopting the slogan "First the people, then the debt." The ORIT history noted that that meeting "established with absolute clarity the necessity of developing the economies of our countries and the overcoming of misery and social marginalization in which the majority of the men and women of Latin America and the Caribbean live as a priority over paying the debt."

This conference also expressed "frontal opposition to the adjustment programs that transfer to the workers the cost of servicing the debt. Of a debt that the workers did not undertake, from which they have not benefited and in the negotiation of which they have not participated. It also insisted that the governments should not socialize the private debt, a debt the money of which in many cases did not even enter our countries, but was dedicated to increase the flight of capital."

After this conference, ORIT organized a series of meetings in which something like 600 union leaders participated, to discuss the debt crisis and encourage the unions in various countries to carry on activities to put forward organized labor's view of the debt issue.<sup>31</sup>

Although the resolution of ORIT on and its agitation for an alternative approach to the debt problem did not have much influence on the policy-makers of either the Latin American and Caribbean governments or the international lending institutions and U.S. government, they did clearly put forward an alternative to the theories and policies insisted upon by those institutions.

One impact of having to face up to the consequences of the debt problem was that ORIT was forced to look more carefully at its affiliates' own activities. One consequence of the economic crisis was the growth of the informal economy, that is, employment in small enterprises (often started by those made unemployed by the economic crises) in which workers had

no protection of labor and social legislation or of trade unionism. The lost decade forced organized labor to begin to become concerned about, and to begin to develop activities to help, those dispossessed segments of the community.<sup>32</sup>

## REFURBISHING OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Both the crisis of the 1980s and the new orientation of ORIT were reflected in the work of its Department of Education, which began to expand in 1986–1987. Secretary-General Anderson noted this in saying that in “the immediate future” the education program would be “designed to foster understanding of the debt, the economic crisis, the arms race, the technological revolution and the development of new trade union policies.”<sup>33</sup>

Trade union leadership education and training expanded substantially on national and regional levels in the later 1980s. With AFL-CIO funds, national educational seminars were held in seven different countries, as well as sub-regional seminars in Peru and Guatemala. Attempts were also undertaken, with financial help from Dutch unions and the ICFTU, to carry on this work in Haiti, which had recently been freed from the Duvalier family dictatorship.<sup>34</sup>

Between 1986 and 1988, there was developed, in collaboration with the Italian CISL labor confederation and the ICFTU, a program for greatly expanding the educational activities of ORIT and its affiliates. The official ORIT history noted:

Through this project there developed in the following years intense activity in spreading and systematizing throughout the region the new directions and content of educational policy. Also, progress was made in giving coherence to the trade union-political message and better coordinating the affiliates from the educational point of view, and creating a chain of contacts that lent it their support. One fundamental aspect was that the project permitted using a group of external consultants to deal with the sub-regions of Central America, the Andean and the Condo Sur.<sup>35</sup>

One effort in particular that was made during this period was to bring into the educational work of ORIT not only its own affiliates but, where possible, union groups that did not yet belong to the organization.<sup>36</sup>

## RECOVERING LEGITIMACY AND ORIT GROWTH

According to the official ORIT history, the organization “recovered legitimacy” as a result of the new orientation that commenced in the late 1970s. This fact resulted in ORIT having an attraction that it had not previously possessed for democratic labor groups that had until then stayed out of

ORIT. The ORIT history noted, "The encounter of these sectors and organizations with the ORIT in process of renovation, of an ORIT that several years before had decided to abandon the conceptual schemes of the cold war, would be one of the most important facts about the period between the middle of the eighties and the middle of the nineties."<sup>37</sup>

A joint mission of ORIT and ICFTU visited Chile in May 1986, to express their organizational support of the struggle of that country's unionists against the Pinochet dictatorship. During that visit, there was formed the Committee of Coordination and Relations (CCR) between the two international organizations and the labor groups leading the struggle against the Pinochet regime. The CCR soon formed the *Confederación Democrática de Trabajadores* (CDT), which affiliated with the ICFTU and ORIT. A few months later, the AFL-CIO, and the CDT and the National Labor Command of Chile, together with ORIT, carried out a joint lobbying effort in Washington, meeting members of Congress and the administration, as well as with the written and oral press "to expose the situation of the dictatorship and its consequences for human rights and trade union rights in the South American country."

In August 1986, ORIT was invited to send a fraternal delegation to the congress of the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT), the largest of the new Brazilian central labor organizations. That visit started a continuing relationship between the Brazilian CUT and ORIT.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of Colombia, which was already suffering from what would prove an almost perpetual civil conflict, involving the elected government, left-wing and right-wing guerrilla groups, and drug traffickers, Secretary-General Anderson made a visit in 1986 to meet with leaders of CUT, which had recently been formed by unification of ORIT's two affiliates, the *Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia* and the *Confederación de Colombia* and the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia* with the Communist Party-controlled *Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Colombia*, and a number of hitherto independent union groups. In 1988, dissidence within CUT led to formation of the *Frente Unitario de Trabajadores Democráticos*, which soon joined ORIT.<sup>39</sup>

In the so-called Southern Cone there was formed, under the auspices of ORIT in September 1986, the *Coordinadora de Centrales Sindicales del Cono Sur* (Coordinator of Central Labor Organizations of the Southern Cone—CCSCS). This brought together the principal labor organizations of Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, and Chile. The *Central Obrera Boliviana* at first also collaborated with the CCSCS, but subsequently dropped out of the group.

The CCSCS concentrated its attention at first on the struggle against the dictatorship of General Pinochet in Chile and General Stroessner in Paraguay. With the fall of these two regimes, it shifted its attention to the growing tendency toward economic unity in the countries of the region,

which found expression in the Mercosur, the Southern Common Market, demanding that organized labor be given in a significant role in the development of that organization.

At the time that the CCSCS was established, the only group participating in it which belonged to ORIT and ICFTU was the Confederación General del Trabajo of Argentina. However, within a few years all of the most significant trade union organizations of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay had become part of the two international organizations. Only the Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores-Convención Nacional de Trabajadores (PIT-CNT) of Uruguay did not join ORIT and ICFTU, although it maintained friendly relations with them.

Eduardo Fernández, the head of the Uruguayan PIT-CNT, explained the origin and development of the CCSCS. He said:

It was not easy at first when most of the central labor groups were not affiliated with the ICFTU-ORIT. The issue [was] confidence of the coordinators of the central labor groups. There was discussion about whether we were the coordinator with the ICFTU-ORIT or the coordinator of the ICFTU-ORIT, and we ended up agreeing that we were the coordinators of the central labor groups with the ICFTU-ORIT. This permitted financial and technical support as well as international recognition. The ILO recognized us because we were supported by the ICFTU-ORIT. Time and reality were resolving everything.<sup>40</sup>

ORIT was also concerned with the conflicts waged in Central America during the 1990s, as has already been noted. The official ORIT history said, "The position of the ICFTU-ORIT in favor of a pacific and democratic solution to the armed conflicts in Central America, concretely in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, was promptly recognized and listened to with respect. On repeated occasions this was shown, including in various forums in Europe." Among other things, ORIT condemned the mining of Nicaraguan harbors by U.S. war planes, to support the so-called contra rebels against the Sandinista government.

In August 1987, the ICFTU and ORIT established the Committee for Defense of Human and Trade Union Rights in Latin America. This Committee "examined the situation in the Central American countries."<sup>41</sup>

## ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANIZATION OF ORIT

In the late 1980s, the ORIT administration was reorganized, and expanded to deal with several aspects of the organization's program. An Office of Human and Trade Union Rights was established, headed by Ana Nitowslaska, a veteran of the Solidarity movement in Poland. "It was dedicated to denouncing, and systematizing information on, violations of human rights... Basically, it was involved in defending the leaders of trade union organizations." It worked with the various national affiliates



and published a bilingual periodical, *Resumen Informativo/Update*. Among other things, it published a pamphlet on Trade Union Rights in Central America. It maintained close contacts with other organizations dedicated to defending human rights, such as Amnesty International, Freedom House, and Americas Watch. At the Twelfth Congress of ORIT, this office was converted into the Department of Human and Trade Union Rights.<sup>42</sup>

The Twelfth Congress also incorporated in the top leadership of ORIT a Department of Women Workers. This had been informally established in 1988 under an Argentine trade unionist, Olga Hammar. Among other things, it held a conference on "The Women Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean," as well as organizing a series of seminars and workshops, in various ORIT national affiliates. It also secured the inclusion of a representative in the Feminine Committee of the ICFTU. At the Twelfth Congress of ORIT it was decided that the head of this department would be a member of the Executive Committee of ORIT.<sup>43</sup>

As early as the Eleventh Congress of ORIT in 1983, a Department of Socio-Economic Projects had been established. It received help from the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut. Its purposes were indicated by Miguel Frolich, who was head of the department from 1986 until the early 1990s: "The socioeconomic projects are sustained in the belief that the unions and organizations of rural workers must attempt to raise the level of their members and their families. Although activity in stimulating the general development of the community, on both a local and national level, is a responsibility of the governments, the workers through these activities seek to stimulate them and thus help their members." Among other things the department sought to convince various public institutions, including the Interamerican Development Bank, to consider workers' organizations as good credit risks. This department also "began to prepare documents on the subject of the informal economy, in the conviction that in it there was a vital challenge for the present and future of trade unionism."<sup>44</sup>

## CHANGE IN ORIT HEADQUARTERS

Although it carries the story of ORIT somewhat beyond the year 1990 that is for most purposes the end of the history recounted in this volume, the movement of the headquarters of the organization from Mexico City to Caracas, Venezuela in 1994 is worthy of mention. In a way, it was an integral part of the reorientation of ORIT that had begun in the late 1970s.

The Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV) was one the principal ORIT affiliates that had pushed the process of reorganizing it and putting the organization on a different course. It seems unlikely that the Confederación de Trabajadores de México, which had played host to ORIT for more than 40 years, shared the enthusiasm of the CTV leaders and ORIT Secretary-General Luis Anderson for changes in the regional organization. Its own record of association with, and greater or lesser

subordination to, the longtime ruling Mexican party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, had considerably discredited the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM) in the eyes of many people inside the organized labor movement.

The official explanations for the change in the ORIT headquarters was stated in its official history, paraphrasing Secretary-General Luis Anderson: "The principal reason for the change of base...was related to the growth of ORIT, particularly toward the south of the continent...From Mexico a trip to Argentina represented a considerable amount of time. In the face of the increased demand for service, because of the growth in affiliates, it was necessary to rationalize and make more effective the use of the time of the leaders of the ORIT. Thus, in 1994 we had a new panorama, a new situation, and the ORIT needed, among many changes, that of its headquarters, to locate it somewhere much nearer the middle of Latin America."

Anderson also insisted that there were financial reasons for the change: "Then the city of Mexico had been converted into a rather expensive city, for the activities and all the things that ORIT made its longest expenditures on: travel, payment of foreign functionaries, communications."

The official ORIT history went out of the way to insist that ORIT was not unhappy with the CTM: "During the time that it was in Mexico, the ORIT as an institution established a really fraternal relationship with Mexico and with the CTM. On a personal basis, also, there were excellent relations between the leaders of the regional organization and its affiliates."

When it became known that the ORIT might move its headquarters, it also received invitations from São Paulo, Brazil and San José, Costa Rica. However, it finally decided that Caracas was the best choice.<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSION

By the 1970s, ORIT had entered into something of a crisis. As we have noted, relations between ORIT and the ICFTU, its parent body, were strained. This strain was intensified by the fact that although the AFL-CIO had dropped out of the ICFTU in 1968 because of disagreements with its leadership, it had continued to play a large role in ORIT, an anomalous situation which, had anyone in the ICFTU, ORIT, or AFL-CIO seen fit to raise it, would clearly be seen unconstitutional.

Although ORIT continued to be the largest of the international labor organizations of the Western Hemisphere, it lacked the vitality and sense of mission which it had in earlier years. There seemed to be considerable doubt about its future.

However, starting in the late 1970s, there began what has been referred to as a reorientation of ORIT. Its inspiration came from the leaders of several of the ORIT affiliates. It would also seem that the orientation was in part made possible by a modification of the evident hostility toward ORIT that

had characterized the leadership of the ICFTU for some time. This transformation of ORIT was also undoubtedly facilitated by the return of the AFL-CIO to membership in the ICFTU, and perhaps a new realization on the part of the AFL-CIO leaders of the value of international labor solidarity arising from the presence in power in the United States after 1980 of an administration that was, to put it mildly, not friendly to organized labor.

In any case, the reorientation of ORIT did not provoke any hostile reaction on the part of the AFL-CIO, as some people had presumed might happen. ORIT remained united and, under the leadership of Secretary-General Luis Anderson, expanded dramatically, and became more than ever in the past the overwhelmingly dominant Western Hemisphere labor confederation.

## NOTES

1. *El Sindicato Interamericano: 50 Años 1951–2001, De su Acción Social y Política* (Caracas: Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores/Confederación Internacional de Organizaciones Sindicales Libres, 2001), p. 151.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 89 and 92–93.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–109.

22. See *ibid.*, pp. 109–117.

23. *ORIT Boletín Informativo*, (México, DF) September 1983.

24. Humberto Murillo (executive assistant of ORIT), interview with the author in Mexico City, September 29, 1983.

25. *El Sindicato Interamericano*, p. 149.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–151.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 117–118.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–122.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 126–127.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 127–128.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–131.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–139.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–139.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 139–140.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–142.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 162–165.

## CHAPTER 9

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# ATLAS

The Agrupación de Trabajadores Latinoamericanos Sindicalistas (ATLAS) was the Latin American trade union group organized in the early 1950s under the patronage of the Argentine government of President Juan Perón. Although it was of short duration, and never achieved the size and influence of the two other regional organizations with which it was in competition—the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) and the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT)—it did for a few years make a bid for leadership of the labor movements of the various Latin American countries.

### THE NATURE OF THE PERÓN REGIME

Since ATLAS reflected the ideas that the Perón government was propagating in the early 1950s, and was part of an attempt by that government to obtain major influence in hemispheric—and even world—affairs, one has to understand the nature of that regime. It was a dictatorship that depended basically on the armed forces and on civilian support that particularly concentrated among the country's trade unionists.

On June 4, 1943, a coup d'état, led principally by middle-ranking officers, overthrew the government of President Ramón Castillo, ending a regime that during the administration of four presidents mainly represented the interests of the rural aristocracy and had maintained its power by fraudulent elections. The immediate cause of the coup was the obvious determination of President Castillo to install as his successor one of the country's principal landlords, who was widely known

to be sympathetic to Great Britain in World War II, which was then in progress.

Although there were few who regretted the overthrow of Castillo, the new military regime soon made itself widely unpopular. It made clear its friendly attitude toward the Axis in the War, suppressing pro-Allied organizations. It closed Congress, seized control of some of the principal labor unions and outlawed others, and imposed strong censorship of the press.

However, some of the young officers quickly realized that in order to remain in power for long, the new regime would have to muster civilian support. Colonel Juan Perón soon emerged as the leader of those officers. Among other posts, he had been given that of head of the Department of Labor, which quickly converted from a mere gatherer of labor statistics into a very active force in the country's labor relations. It was soon converted in to the Secretariat of Labor.

As secretary of labor, Perón soon began to issue a series of decree laws that constituted an extensive body of labor legislation for which the labor movement had been struggling with little or no success for many years. He also began to intervene in labor disputes, bringing the government's support to demands of the unions in these disputes. Perón also encouraged the rapid expansion of the labor movement into parts of the economy in which it had been very weak or had not existed at all.

At the same time, Perón sought to win the support of the leadership of the unions for the regime, and most particularly for him within that regime. Many union leaders who until then had been Socialists or Sindicalists began to give such support, thinking that they were using Perón and the regime, only to find out, in many cases, that Perón was using them, becoming able to appeal to their rank and file over the heads of the leaders. By the middle of 1944, Perón supporters had won control of the principal central labor organization, the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT).

Although Perón gave substantial support to those trade union leaders who were willing to cooperate with him and to praise his decree legislation and his intervention in individual labor disputes, he and the regime became ruthless in dealing with those labor officials who were not willing to do so. Many of the more important Communist union leaders were sent to a concentration camp in the frigid far South. The Labor Secretariat helped establish rival unions to those headed by people critical of Perón and the regime. Finally, in 1945 a decree law was issued that made it necessary for unions to obtain government recognition (*personería gremial*) in order to engage in collective bargaining, whereupon the Labor Secretariat refused to give such recognition to unions headed by people unfriendly to Colonel Perón, while extending it to newly organized dual unions, even though the great majority of the workers of that trade or industry still belonged to the union that the Secretariat refused to recognize. The dual

union became the one with which employers were henceforth forced to negotiate, and the original (now unrecognized) union became all but useless so far as its members were concerned.

His winning civilian support made Perón the single most important figure in the military regime. Early in 1944 he became vice president, and from then until October 1945, he virtually dominated the regime.

However, in October 1945, he was ousted and jailed as a result of a new military coup. At that point, his labor supporters rallied to his defense, descending on Buenos Aires, where the city streets were virtually taken over by his followers. The military who had ousted him were not willing to have a bloody showdown with his working-class supporters, and he was released from jail. Although he did not resume his position in the government, he soon announced his candidacy for president, to which he was elected in February 1946, taking office on June 4, 1946, the third anniversary of the 1943 coup.

During his first years as president, Juan Perón largely turned control of labor matters over to his new wife, Eva Duarte de Perón. She very soon launched a massive drive to get rid of most of the trade union leaders who had been the early supporters of Perón, and to whom in large degree he owed his ascendance to power. For them, she substituted people who had not owed their original trade union leadership to the support of their rank and file, but rather to her and her husband. In a case in which there was rank and file resistance to such change of leadership, force was used to accomplish it—the two most famous examples of this being the railroad workers' union *La Fraternidad* and the maritime workers.

Perón had been supported in the 1946 election by three parties, the largest of which was the new *Partido Laborista* (Labor Party) formed by trade union leaders. After taking office, Perón insisted on the merger of these three parties to form the *Partido Peronista*, and all unionists who opposed this move were severely persecuted.

The *Partido Peronista* was an important vehicle for obtaining and keeping the loyalty of the workers for the regime. Many trade union leaders were elected to Congress and the provincial and local legislatures on the party's ticket.

There were even trade unionists who held cabinet positions. One was Angel Borlenghi, the ex-Socialist leader of the Commercial Employees Confederation, who was minister of interior throughout most of the 1946–1955 administration, and was one of the stronger members of the Perón administration. Another was Juan Bramuglia, also an ex-Socialist and longtime lawyer for the two railroad workers' unions, who was foreign minister until forced out because of conflicts with Eva Perón. Finally, there was José María Freire, a leader of the Glass Workers Federation, who was secretary (and then minister) of labor, in which post he served virtually as the shadow of Eva Perón. Finally, Ramón Coreijo, who was also a trade unionist, served for some time as minister of finance.<sup>1</sup>



For both internal political purposes and foreign consumption Perón developed an ideology for the Peronista movement, which he labeled "Justicialismo." Although the exact nature of Justicialismo remained somewhat vague and to some degree depended on which person was defining it, there were at least two elements of the ideology that were clear. One was that Justicialismo was "the Third Position," rejecting both Communism and capitalism. The second was that it advocated a regime in which the workers and other underprivileged classes would be dominant. The objectives of Justicialismo were frequently summed up as "Justicia Social, Libertad Económica, Independencia Política" (Social Justice, Economic Freedom, Political Independence).<sup>2</sup>

### ARGENTINE LABOR ATTACHÉS

From the time Juan Perón became president of Argentina his administration sought to spread the doctrines of Justicialismo and the Third Position, as well as information about the things that the regime had accomplished and was accomplishing, in other countries, particularly in Latin America. It was specially interested in spreading the good word among the labor movements of Latin America concerning the great benefits that it claimed to have brought to the Argentine labor movement and the Argentine workers in general.

The labor attachés in Argentine embassies played a key role in achieving this aim. The position of labor attaché was established by Perón's first foreign minister, Juan Atilio Bramuglia, whose trade union background we have already noted. Those chosen for these posts, according to John Deiner, were usually staunch Peronistas, but labor leaders of second or third rank. Such men could be spared from the job of ensuring labor support for the government within Argentina, and presumably would be able to perform creditably their task of engendering support for Argentina and its policies among laboring elements outside the borders of the nation.

In preparation for their jobs, the labor attachés were given courses in trade union matters "and in the principles and practices of Peronismo in regard to labor." Once on the job, they sought to seek out and develop contacts with trade union leaders who might be sympathetic to the Peron regime's policies in the labor field, and to help these people extend their influence and develop a wider support for the Perón regime and the Peronista-controlled trade union movement in Argentina.<sup>3</sup>

One important part of the work of the labor attachés was what might be called trade union tourism. This involved arranging for groups of Argentine trade union leaders to visit the country to which a labor attaché was accredited, to meet with and get to know trade unionists in that country, and develop feelings of friendship and solidarity. It also involved tourism in the other direction, arranging visits by labor leaders of the other country

to Argentina, to see for themselves the situation of the labor movement and the workers in general.

John Deiner has sketched what trade unionists from other countries might experience during such visits: "The group of trade unionists were treated to an extensive program of dinners, barbecues, and visits to trade union organizations, factories, conventions, and social service institutes. The group's itinerary also usually included a trip to Tucumán or Córdoba, or perhaps the resorts of Bariloche and Mar del Plata. During these excursions, the foreign delegations were accompanied by various members of the secretariat of the CGT. The highlights of the visits came in interviews granted to the visitors by the President himself, by his wife Evita, and by Angel Borlenghi, Minister of the Interior."<sup>4</sup>

Over the years, I met enough Latin American trade unionists who were the beneficiaries of such tourism to know that it was frequently quite successful, at least for a while, in winning sympathy, if not support, for Perón and the CGT.

When the decision was finally made to establish a Peronista-oriented Latin American labor organization, the Argentine labor attachés had additional roles, of recruiting union groups in the countries to which they were assigned to affiliate with that organization, and then supervising those affiliates of the Peronista hemispheric confederation.

## INTERNATIONAL FRUSTRATIONS OF PERONISTAS

Before definitely deciding to try to organize a new labor international in the Peronista image in Latin America, the Peronista leaders of the Confederación General del Trabajo suffered three frustrating experiences. One of these was an attempt to win the support of the American Federation of Labor, the other two were unsuccessful efforts to secure membership in the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores (CIT) and ORIT.

In their efforts to bring into existence an alternative to the Communist-controlled Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, the attention of the AFL leaders logically turned to the Argentine labor movement. Under Peronista leadership it had withdrawn from CTAL, and it was one of the largest and most powerful labor movements in the Western Hemisphere.

Of course, Serafino Romualdi, who was heading the AFL's effort to establish a rival to CTAL, and who was well acquainted with the pre-Perón Argentine labor movement, had heard about the Perón government's crushing of non-Peronista elements within the Argentine trade unions. So when he headed the AFL mission that went to Buenos Aires in January 1947 on the invitation of the CGT Secretary-General Luis Gay, he certainly had his reservations about the situation.

When the American delegation was asked by the Argentine press why it was in the country, Romualdi said that it was there "to investigate" the

situation of the Argentine labor movement. Soon after, President Perón let it be known that no foreigner had the right to "investigate" his country's trade unions or anything else. His wife also quickly brought about the resignation of Luis Gay and several other CGT leaders closely associated with him, for having extended the invitation to the AFL. This incident brought about the beginning of the mass purge (which we have already noted) from leadership of those trade union officials who had led their unions in support of Perón between 1943 and 1945.

As might have been expected, the AFL delegation, upon its return home, issued a report on the Argentine labor movement that stressed the strong government control over it, and the persecution of those unionists who had opposed organized labor's support of Perón. For their part, the Peronista labor leaders began a violent campaign of denunciation of the AFL, and particularly of Serafino Romualdi, who was almost never referred to thereafter without some opprobrious epithet accompanying his name.<sup>5</sup>

When the founding congress of CIT was being organized, no invitation was extended to the Argentine CGT to attend it. It is not clear what the CGT's reaction would have been had such an invitation been made.

However, the issue of the absence of the CGT from the proceedings in Lima was raised immediately by Luis Morones, secretary-general of the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana, who asked why neither the central labor group of Argentina nor that of the Dominican Republic (then ruled by the horrendous dictatorship of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo) had been invited to the Lima conference. He was told that the question would be discussed at the first plenary session of the conference.

One of the first items on the agenda of that plenary meeting was a motion denouncing the treatment of the Argentine labor movement by the Perón regime. Morones immediately objected strongly to that motion, and took the occasion to make a violent attack on Serafino Romualdi, who, he said, had insulted the Argentine labor movement in his ill-fated visit to Buenos Aires. Morones also claimed that the Lima meeting to establish CIT was really a maneuver of the U.S. government, with whom Romualdi had conspired to bring it about.

Morones ended by announcing his withdrawal from the Lima conference. Subsequently, he went to Buenos Aires, where he was greeted warmly by the CGT leaders, had a special audience with President Perón and Evita, and was generally lionized by the Peronistas.<sup>6</sup>

Although the CGT leaders had no chance to influence whether or not they would have been willing to participate in the CIT, it is clear that three years later they were interested in becoming part of its successor, the ORIT. Controversy over whether a delegation of the Argentine CGT should be seated almost disrupted the founding congress of the ORIT, and for a while resulted in most of the Mexican delegates withdrawing from the meeting.

The details of planning the Founding Congress of ORIT had been to a large degree left up to the Mexican labor groups that were to play hosts to the meeting, particularly the leaders of the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), the largest Mexican central labor organization. The leaders of Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM), who were not part of the group planning the congress, approached the CTM leaders, suggesting that an invitation to the meeting be extended to the CGT of Argentina, as a result of which, such an invitation was sent.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, a delegation headed by Isaías Santín, one of the principal leaders of the CGT, did arrive in Mexico and demanded to be seated at the congress.

The debate over the issue was violent. When the majority of the delegates refused to accept the CGT credentials, and instead seated Candido Gregorio and Alfredo Fianza of the Comité Obrero Argentino de Sindicatos Independientes (COASI), the small organization of anti-Peronista Argentine labor leaders, Fidel Velázquez, secretary-general of the CTM, who had been serving as chairman, resigned that post. He and other CTM delegates, together with those from some other Mexican union groups, withdrew from the meeting. Subsequently, those delegates met with the Argentine delegation and issued a denunciation of the action of the ORIT congress. However, the CTM soon joined ORIT, and in 1953 the ORIT headquarters was moved from Havana to Mexico City.

The CGT had its own explanation of what had happened at the ORIT meeting. Without mentioning that the CGT delegates' credentials had been rejected by the congress, the CGT said that its delegates had "refused to participate in the convention because they recognized the convention as an imperialist maneuver," and "because the officers of the convention had been pre-appointed, rather than elected by the delegates."<sup>8</sup>

The failure of the Peronistas to get a platform to propagate their ideas and their influence within what from its inception was the largest hemispheric trade union confederation undoubtedly was a major factor in their finally deciding to establish one of their own. However, this was not the first time that they had considered this idea.

In April 1948, shortly after the rebuff to the CGT at the founding congress of CIT in Lima, a visit by a group of Latin American trade union leaders from various countries was the occasion for the CGT hosts to get them to sign a document urging the formation of another Latin American labor confederation "which would promote roughly the same ideas as those being propounded by the makers of Argentine foreign policy." Although the Argentines sought to get their guests to sign a document calling for a constituent congress of such an organization the Argentines were unsuccessful. Most of the visitors refused, saying that before leaving for Argentina they had not received any authorization to sign such a document.

The most the visiting trade unionists would do was to sign a document which, although it "contained some interesting ideas," did not issue any

call for the immediate formation of a new Latin American central labor group. The visitors promised in this document "to lend their support to all works which tend to unite the workers of Latin America for the achievement of these objectives by means of a worker organization of continental scope."<sup>9</sup>

The CGT won what must have seemed like a more favorable reception to the idea of a new Latin American central labor group after the rebuff of the CGT at the founding congress of ORIT in January 1951. A meeting between the Mexican union leaders who had walked out of the ORIT meeting and the Argentine delegation, which was not accepted there, was followed almost immediately by a new CGT delegation visiting Mexico. John Deiner observed, "It seems quite apparent that the underlying purpose of the trip was to explore the extent of possible Mexican support for an international trade union organization in Latin America motivated by Peronista ideals, with an Argentine-Mexican axis as the basis of mass support. . . . It was largely on the basis of CGT-CROM cooperation that ATLAS was later to come into existence."<sup>10</sup>

### **THE COMITÉ DE UNIDAD SINDICAL LATINOAMERICANO (CUSLA)**

The first practical step toward the formation of a Peronista-oriented Latin American labor confederation was a conference that met in Asunción, Paraguay in February 1952. Its self-proclaimed purpose was "to establish the basis for the First International Labor Central with true principles of democratic self-determination, since being foreign to the control of international capitalism and of Soviet Communism, it will be the authentic spokesman for the perennial aspirations for economic revindication and the liberation of our peoples."<sup>11</sup>

The meeting was preceded by the First Trade Union Conference of the Rio de la Plata Region, which met at the invitation of the Confederación Paraguaya de Trabajadores (CPT). Its opening session was addressed by Florentino López, secretary-general of the CPT, Paraguayan Minister of Labor Guillermo Enciso Velloso, Secretary-General Omar Díaz of the Confederación General del Trabajo del Uruguay, and José Espejo, secretary-general of the Argentine CGT. It officially called for the formation of a Comité de Unidad Sindical Latinoamericano (CUSLA), and then apparently adjourned.<sup>12</sup>

Three days later the conference met once again, but this time as the Founding Congress of the CUSLA. It was claimed in the official report on the CUSLA that there were delegates present at that session from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Peru—although no indication was given as to the names of the organizations that those delegates represented.<sup>13</sup>

The first issue for discussion was whether that meeting itself should establish the new Latin American confederation or just establish a committee to bring it into existence. Several delegates expressed support for the second alternative, and José Espejo of the Argentine CGT brought an end to the discussion by also expressing his support for that motion.<sup>14</sup>

There was some real debate over where the headquarters of the new Comité de Unidad should be located. The first proposal was that it be in Buenos Aires, but some delegates suggested Rio de Janeiro instead, arguing that the presence of the CUSLA in the Argentine capital would mean that enemies of the Argentine labor movement would accuse it of dominating the new organization. However, when a vote was taken, there were nine in favor of Buenos Aires, four for Rio de Janeiro, and three delegates who abstained.<sup>15</sup>

The structure of the new Comité de Unidad was next debated. Among other things, it provided that its finances should come from each organization belonging to the CUSLA, paying 5 percent of its gross income as dues to the comité "except when economic reasons made it possible."

There was some discussion over whether representation within the CUSLA should be by country or by individual labor union that was affiliated to the comité. Luis Morones, who had arrived after the conference began, urged representation by individual organization, since in several countries (particularly Mexico), there were several different union groups that might become members of the CUSLA. However, the idea of representation by country, which was apparently supported by the Argentines, was adopted, and it was agreed that one of the functions of CUSLA would be to help establish central labor organizations that could join the new Latin American confederation when it was finally formed in countries where none such existed; and where there were several competing central labor groups CUSLA would encourage their unification into a single affiliate of the forthcoming Latin American confederation.<sup>16</sup>

A Declaration of Principles was also adopted. It reflected the Peronista origins of the meeting, endorsing the Third Position then espoused by Perón and, without so identifying it, used the favorite Peronista slogan: the declaration proclaimed the need in Latin America for "the sincere unity of all workers identified by the common determination to affirm, in each country, the democratic ideas of social justice, economic freedom and political independence."

The declaration said that the world was divided between "Communist imperialism that tries to submit the peoples to the dictatorship of the State and on the other side the exploiting capitalist imperialism," and argued that "it is necessary to raise the banner of peace and justice, in a position neither communist nor capitalist."<sup>17</sup>

The Asunción conference also adopted a number of general resolutions. These included demands for the independence of Puerto Rico, condemnation of the military regime then in power in Bolivia, denunciation of the



so-called "Law for the Defense of Democracy" in Chile, and attacking the behavior of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala.

The final decision of the founding conference of the CUSLA was to elect a Secretariat to carry forward the work of organization. José Espejo was named secretary-general, Omar Díaz of Uruguay was secretary of organization, Héctor Gutiérrez Zamora of Costa Rica was secretary of exterior relations, Rubén Hurtado of Chile was recording secretary, Joviano de Araújo of Brazil became secretary of finances, and Molière Compas of Haiti was named secretary of press and propaganda.<sup>18</sup>

The Peronista orientation of the non-Argentines associated with the CUSLA was indicated by what Julio César Sánchez, a Colombian who was the office manager of the organization and Executive Committee member of the tiny Confederación General de Trabajadores de Colombia, told me. He objected to CUSLA being labeled "Peronista," but then said that those active in it saw that the Perón government had given Argentina "economic independence" and had done the things that all Latin Americans had wanted their governments to do. It was pro-labor and helped the workers. He added that when the United States opposed such a regime, it was "only natural" that the workers of Latin America would come to its support. They would continue to do so in spite of anything that the United States might say or do.<sup>19</sup>

The Comité de Unidad Sindical Latinoamericano only lasted about nine months. At the end of that period the new Latin American labor confederation the foundation of which was the avowed purpose of CUSLA actually took place. The CUSLA's short career was marked by extensive propaganda and organizing activities.

Publicity and propaganda activities included publication of a monthly periodical, *Informativo*, with news about CUSLA and the groups associated with it in various countries, as well as printing and wide distribution of the Declaration of Principles of CUSLA and other documents about the Asunción meeting. Special pronouncements were issued on the occasion of labor holidays—May 1st, and so forth—or such current events as a banana workers' strike in United Fruit Company plantations in Guatemala, and the Bolivian National Revolution in April 1952, in which the organized workers played a major role.

In organizational terms, the immediate objective was to form subcommittees of CUSLA in each country, which could prepare for sending a national delegation to the founding congress of the new hemispheric trade union confederation that was to be established. In this task, the CUSLA had very considerable help from the various Argentine labor attachés who were acquainted with trade unionists more or less sympathetic with Peronismo.

Late in September two three-man delegations were sent out by CUSLA to South America and the Central American-Caribbean regions respectively, to help wind up preparations for the forthcoming founding



convention of a new Latin American labor confederation. The South American mission consisted of Omar Díaz of Uruguay, Rubén Hurtado of Chile and José F. Agarrabernes of Argentina, and they visited Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. The other delegation consisted of Rafael Oronas, an Argentine, Héctor Gutiérrez Zamora of Costa Rica, and Molière Campos of Haiti. Both of these groups sent back optimistic reports about the situation in the countries they visited, although they also described certain "difficulties" faced by CUSLA supporters in the various nations.<sup>20</sup>

The CUSLA was almost entirely financed by the Argentine CGT. It directly appropriated 400,000 pesos for the Asunción meeting that established CUSLA. Subsequently, the newspaper *La Prensa*, controlled by the CGT, contributed one million pesos to the organization.<sup>21</sup>

## FORMATION OF ATLAS

The Founding Congress of the Agrupación de Trabajadores Latinoamericanos Sindicalistas opened on November 20, 1952 with a plenary session in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. There were substantial delegations from the Argentine CGT and from Mexico, where those represented included CROM and several of the major independent industrial unions. However, John Deiner summed up the situation of many (if not most) of those represented in the Mexico meeting: "The program of exchanging visits and subsidized trips which had begun in the 1940s had paid off with the presence of pro-Argentine, pro-CUSLA trade unionists who could come to Mexico City as delegates to represent the working men of the various countries of Latin America. Even though these might have little mass support in their native countries, they did provide an international flavor, and the necessary geographical distribution so that the organization was to be created could truly be said to encompass the entire Latin American area."<sup>22</sup>

The main purpose of the meeting in Mexico City, of course, was to establish the new Latin American labor confederation. There were no major disputes in the process of the six days through which the congress met, although there were some relatively minor differences of opinion that emerged. One centered on the name of the new organization. The Argentines had originally suggested Asociación de Trabajadores Latinoamericanos Sindicatos, but on the suggestion of some Central American delegates it was modified to Agrupación de Trabajadores Latinoamericanos Sindicalistas. Both names provided the initials ATLAS, making possible the symbol the CGT delegates had suggested of Atlas holding up the world.<sup>23</sup>

Rather more consequential was a debate over where the headquarters of the new organization should be located. The Argentines apparently had more or less taken for granted that ATLAS, like the CUSLA, would

be located in Buenos Aires, but Luis Morones of CROM suggested, with considerable emphasis, that it should be in Mexico City. Finally, the Argentines got their way on the issue.<sup>24</sup>

Two basic documents were adopted at the ATLAS founding congress. One was a Declaration of Principles, which was largely the same as that of the CUSLA, endorsing once again the Third Position and stating the basic things that ATLAS was seeking to achieved were "social justice, economic freedom and political independence," the Peronistas favorite slogan.<sup>25</sup>

The other basic document was the statutes of the new organization. This, after proclaiming the creation of the ATLAS and noting its base in Buenos Aires, set forth in Article Two the "Objectives and Purposes" of the new organization. That article listed 19 different kinds of activities that ATLAS would engage in. These included such things as "contributing to the unity of the working class in each of the Latin American countries," "procuring the unification of the workers of Latin American continent," "struggle against unemployment," "representing the trade union movement of Latin America in existing international organisms," "struggle against all forms of imperialism," "struggle for the land to belong to whoever works it," and "foster interchanges of delegations of workers, of tourism of the workers and of reciprocal scholarships for workers."<sup>26</sup>

The statutes provided for three levels of authority in ATLAS: the Continental Congress, the Continental Council, and Executive Committee. It set forth the basis of representation in the Continental Congress, ranging from organizations with 100,000 dues payers getting one delegate to organizations with more than five million dues payers having 10 delegates. It also provided more details about how the Continental Congress would function, and provided that it should meet every three years.

The Continental Council, composed of one delegate from each country, should meet once a year and be presided over by the secretary-general of ATLAS. It was, after the Continental Congress, the highest directing organ of ATLAS.

As far as the Executive Committee of ATLAS was concerned, the statutes provided that "[e]verything related to the direction and administration of ATLAS will be the business of the Executive Committee, made up of seven members and five alternates." Its members were to be elected by the Continental Congress for a term of three years, at which point they could be reelected. Among its other powers were to accept new member organizations of ATLAS, issue summonses to the Continental Congress, and "coordinate the action of the affiliated organizations, being able to suspend the affiliation of the same in case of grave reasons, and obliged to report this decision to the next Congress or Continental Council meeting."<sup>27</sup> As it turned out, the only one of these three bodies that functioned in the short period of ATLAS's existence was the Executive Committee.

The secretary-general of ATLAS was intended to be the organization's most powerful figure. The statutes said, "The Secretary General is the

representative of ATLAS in all of its acts." Any documents issued by other members of the Executive had to be countersigned by him, he had exclusive power to employ and dismiss the administration personnel of ATLAS. Finally, "The Secretary General will have the power to adopt by himself resolutions that are the responsibility of the Executive Committee, but must inform that body the first time it meets of the measures taken."<sup>28</sup>

The statutes had an interesting section on "Of the Affiliated Organizations." It provided in Article 42 that "[t]he affiliated organizations have full autonomy, keep the fullest independence for action and can decide without authorization of ATLAS all national activities, having in the case of international actions to consult ATLAS and adjust themselves to its principles and programs." The "duties" of the affiliates were to pay their dues, "send to ATLAS copies of their statutes, the number of their affiliates and a financial account for each period; lend their collaboration for fulfilling the objectives of ATLAS, [and] use in all publications the label or imprint of ATLAS."<sup>29</sup>

One of the last actions of the Founding Congress of ATLAS was to choose the new Executive Committee. According to Juan R. Garone, who by 1954 when I interviewed him was secretary-general of ATLAS, it was agreed at the Founding Congress that the secretary-general should be an Argentine.<sup>30</sup> The choice for the post was José Espejo, then secretary-general of the Argentine CGT who, along with other Executive Committee members, was named "by acclamation."<sup>31</sup> The other members of the Executive came from Chile, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, and Peru.<sup>32</sup>

## ATLAS IN ACTION

The first meeting of the Executive Committee of Atlas was held in Buenos Aires over a period stretching from January 6 to February 16, 1953. One of the most important decisions of that session was that a national committee of ATLAS would be set up in every country in which the organization had affiliates. The members of these committees would be nominated by the local groups but had to be approved by the ATLAS Executive Committee, and would "carry out the instructions of the Executive Committee." The Buenos Aires newspaper *La Prensa*, then owned and controlled by the CGT, reported, "Any accords adopted by the national committee that may conflict with the stated doctrines and ideals set out in the declaration of principles of the organism (ATLAS) will be void."<sup>33</sup> So long as ATLAS remained active, these national committees were to be its principal organizations in most of the countries in which it had any experience at all.

Sometimes the ATLAS headquarters in Buenos Aires stepped in to "re-organize" these national committees. For instance, it did so in Chile in the middle of 1953.<sup>34</sup>

In February 1954 the ATLAS decided to supplement the national committee with "advisory commissions," which were to study both the economic

and trade union problems of their respective countries and so enable the ATLAS organizations to be prepared to meet crisis and to take maximum advantage of favorable developments." John Deiner noted, "A not incidental result of the creation of the commissions was that...by working through the advisory commissions, the international leadership of ATLAS could bypass ineffective national committees, and could bring greater expertise to bear on problems which might arise in the various Latin American countries."<sup>35</sup>

Between 1953 and 1955 officials of ATLAS made two extensive tours around Latin America, stimulating the publicity for and organizing efforts of the national trade union groups associated with it. The first of these voyages was made by Executive Committee members Florentino Maya (Mexican), Héctor Gutiérrez Zamora (Costa Rican), and Fernando Pérez Vidal (Cuban) who visited Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Cuba, "giving life to national committees where such were not already operating."<sup>36</sup>

The second tour was made between late July and early September 1953 by Pérez Vidal, who had recently succeeded José Espejo as ATLAS secretary-general. He was accompanied by Héctor Hugo Prieto, adjunct secretary of the Argentine CGT. They started out in Mexico where they attended a national convention of CROM. They then went to Cuba, where "Pérez Vidal visited with labor leaders," although obviously they won few, if any, converts to ATLAS. They then visited Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Panama and apparently discussed the possibility of setting up "a powerful Central American labor organization." No such group was actually established.

Pérez Vidal even visited Canada on this tour. He was present at a congress of the Quebec-based Confederation of Catholic Workers "and gained the support of that group for the aims of ATLAS," although apparently got no promises of affiliation with ATLAS.

Pérez Vidal and Prieto then visited Venezuela and Colombia. In the former, they negotiated with a so-called *Movimiento Obrero Independiente* that had been organized under the auspices of the country's military dictator, General Marcos Pérez Jiménez. In Colombia they met with the leaders of two of the few ATLAS groups that had some semblance of worker support, the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores de Colombia* and the *Federación de Trabajadores de Cundinamarca*, in the capital city of Bogotá.

They rounded out their travels with stops in Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. In the first of these they met with "various trade unionists," although ATLAS had no serious affiliates there. In Peru they "were received by high ranking...officials of the dictatorship of General Manuel Odría." Finally, in Chile they conferred with the leaders of their small (although real) affiliates, and were received by President Carlos Ibáñez.<sup>37</sup>

In September 1954, Juan Garone, by then secretary-general of ATLAS, took another tour, this time to Central America and the west coast of South

America. He was accompanied by José F. Agarraberes, a member of the Argentine National Committee of ATLAS. He gave a more or less glowing report of the state of the organization's affiliates in those areas.

ATLAS also took preliminary steps to organize subsidiary groups composed of unions of particular industries in various Latin American countries. Thus, in November 1953 there was a meeting in Buenos Aires of leaders of unions of air transport workers. Such meetings were "designed to provide services to ATLAS affiliates and friends."<sup>38</sup>

The ATLAS leaders sought to obtain recognition in the International Labor Organization in Geneva, where in the past the Perón regime had been the subject of considerable attack from various labor organizations. In 1953, ATLAS sent the Puerto Rican trade unionists and recording secretary of ATLAS, Francisco Colón Gordiany, to the ILO's annual meeting. According to John Deiner, "Colón Gordiany was quick to applaud the Argentine worker delegation's attack on the ILO for not recognizing the great advances which had been made in Argentina. Colón Gordiany, in the name of ATLAS, energetically repudiated charges by various worker delegations that Perón had ended trade union freedom in Argentina. He saw these charges as being the work of political malcontents." However, ATLAS was not able to get official recognition from the ILO.<sup>39</sup>

ATLAS published statements about events in Latin America and elsewhere. For instance, in August 1953 the Chilean copper miners were facing serious problems due to a fall in demand for the mineral. ATLAS urged "its members to send telegrams to Chilean president Ibáñez, and to send telegrams to their own governments urging the purchase of Chilean copper."<sup>40</sup>

ATLAS also publicized its support for the government of Panama, which was negotiating with the United States about changes in the treaties covering the operation of the Panama Canal.

Sometimes ATLAS spoke out about issues beyond the confines of Latin America. Thus, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Egyptian revolution that had put in power General Mohamed Naguib, it sent a telegram to him "identifying itself with the revolution, and urging you, from far away, to carry out the revolutionary task for the good of the workers of your country and as example for the world."<sup>41</sup>

John Deiner summed up the achievements of ATLAS during its first year of existence. He noted:

They had no reason to feel especially gratified. They had established a network of local organizations, called national committees, throughout Latin America which could be used as a base for propaganda efforts, and for contacting local unions. The national committees of ATLAS, however, generally had very little support in their own countries, and could not actually direct the actions of significant groups of workers. The ATLAS had been somewhat successful in publicizing the achievements of the Argentine workers under Perón.... The charges made against Perón

and the condemnations of the lack of trade union freedom in Argentina were difficult obstacles for ATLAS to overcome.<sup>42</sup>

## LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS OF ATLAS

During its short period of activity, ATLAS experienced some leadership difficulties. Some of these involved the defection of non-Argentines from the leadership of the organization. I encountered one such situation. In August 1952, I interviewed two Colombians, one of whom was secretary of the CUSLA and the other its office manager, both of whom continued on the staff of ATLAS, and each, although not liking to be called Peronistas, were almost eloquent in their praise of what Perón had done for the workers of Argentina.<sup>43</sup> Two years later, Juan Garone, secretary-general of ATLAS, told me that these two men "had turned traitor to the organization."<sup>44</sup>

Much more serious was the change in top ATLAS leadership that resulted from internal Argentine politics. José Espejo, the secretary-general of the Argentine CGT, had unanimously been elected secretary-general of ATLAS at its founding meeting. However, his patron in Argentina had been Perón's wife, Evita Duarte de Perón, and soon after her death in August 1952, President Perón carried out a purge of many of the people who had worked closely with her. As a result, José Espejo was soon forced to resign from the leadership of the Confederación General del Trabajo, and in May 1953 he also had to quit his post as head of ATLAS.

At first, the ATLAS leadership decided to name a Cuban, Fernando Pérez Vidal, as Espejo's successor. John Deiner said that "Pérez Vidal was chosen apparently to get a non-Argentine into the post of secretary-general and thus to give less blatant evidence of Argentine control of ATLAS."<sup>45</sup>

However, by May 1954, by which time Espejo had also resigned from the Argentine National Committee of ATLAS, and from the Executive Committee of ATLAS, another change in the top leadership of ATLAS was made. Juan Garone, onetime secretary of Espejo, member of the Exterior Department of the Argentine CGT and member of the ATLAS Argentine National Committee, was named to replace Espejo on the ATLAS Executive Committee, and was immediately chosen as secretary-general. Pérez Vidal became secretary for legislation and labor.<sup>46</sup>

A couple of months later, Juan Garone told me that Pérez Vidal had been replaced because "he was more interested in making a name for himself than he was in building the organization." Garone added that Pérez Vidal had engaged in personal attacks on ORIT leaders, particularly Serafino Romualdi, and that "[t]his is not right."<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, Perón and his government had begun to lose interest in ATLAS. In July 1953, soon after Dwight Eisenhower became president of the United States, he sent his brother Milton on a tour around Latin America to assess the situation in various countries and then to suggest to the



president what his government's policies toward Latin America should be. Both during Milton Eisenhower's stay in Buenos Aires and thereafter, there was a notable softening of the hostile attitude toward the United States that the Perón government had had until then. This change had an impact on ATLAS.

John Deiner noted:

For ATLAS, the change in the position of the Argentine government meant that it, too, had to discontinue its violent attacks on the United States. The new ATLAS policy became one of attacking individual leaders of ORIT as traitors to the Latin American labor movement. ATLAS also became more specific in its attacks on United States businesses, firms doing business in Latin America....ATLAS did, however, remain more militant in its opposition to the activities of the United States than did the government in Buenos Aires.<sup>48</sup>

The change in ATLAS's attitude toward the United States was reflected in a meeting of the Executive Committee in May 1954. Apparently its only resolution directly concerning the United States was one urging the U.S. Congress to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act, or at least not to have it apply to Puerto Rico. John Deiner commented on this: "When compared to earlier anti-United States statements by ATLAS, this 1954 resolution is extremely mild in its criticism."<sup>49</sup>

The reduction of Argentine Peronista interest in ATLAS was reflected in the relatively modest publicity given in the press in November 1954 to the second anniversary of the founding of the organization. This was "in marked contrast to the extensive coverage given ATLAS on its first anniversary the previous year."<sup>50</sup>

## FINANCES OF ATLAS

During the two and half years that ATLAS was functioning, most of the funds for financing it came from three Argentine sources. Although the statutes of both CUSLA and ATLAS provided that the finances should come from dues paid by the organizations affiliated with them, this was hardly the case in fact. Apparently only the CGT and the Mexican CROM actually made dues contributions.<sup>51</sup>

The CGT had largely financed the meeting in Asunción that had established the CUSLA, providing 400,000 Argentine pesos. It also "spent a large amount of money" for the Mexico City congress at which ATLAS was founded, paying the transportation costs of delegates attending that meeting. Once the headquarters of ATLAS was set up in Buenos Aires, the CGT provided 2.7 million pesos involved in establishing it, and also paid the rent on the building in which it was located.

Another source of financing ATLAS that was associated with the CGT was the Empresa Periodística Argentina SA (EPASA), the company



established when the daily newspaper *La Prensa* was confiscated by the Perón government and turned over to the CGT. It paid ATLAS 100,000 pesos a month until the fall of Perón, which was spent principally on "overseas operations," and the total was said to be some 4,235,000 pesos.

Finally, the undersecretariat for diffusion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided funds particularly to the labor attachés in various Latin American countries who, according to John Deiner, "transmitted money and advice from official Argentine government sources to agents of the supposedly international, non-governmental labor organization, ATLAS."<sup>52</sup>

## ATLAS AS A PROPAGANDIST FOR PERONISMO

The fact that most of the financial resources of ATLAS came from Argentine union and government sources is not the only indication of the domination of ATLAS by the Argentine Peronistas, and that it was a major tool of the Perón government in spreading the "gospel" of President Perón and his regime. That this was so was made clear by both non-Argentine and Argentine leaders of the organization.

John Deiner noted that the first meeting of the ATLAS Executive Committee in Buenos Aires in January 1953 was "enlivened by a series of speeches by various members of the Executive Committee which demonstrated their almost slavish submission to Peronismo."<sup>53</sup> He gave a few examples of these statements.

The Cuban Fernando Pérez Vidal, who would for a time serve as secretary-general of ATLAS, announced that upon his return home he would be "the most loyal missionary of the work of General Perón."<sup>54</sup> A few months later, in July 1953, Pérez Vidal stated that "ATLAS supports and makes its own the Third Position of the Justicialista government of the New Argentina."<sup>55</sup>

Puerto Rican Francisco Colón Gordiany claimed, "We also are fanatically Peronista. We are determined to fight for the freedom of Latin America."<sup>56</sup> A few months later, as ATLAS spokesman at the annual meeting of the ILO, he "energetically repudiated charges by various worker delegations that Perón had ended trade union freedom in Argentina...claimed that Argentina had actually led the world in providing a fitting and dignified position in society for trade unionists."<sup>57</sup> However, in a conversation with me in 1955, he said that as the result of visiting Argentina every three to six months as a member of the ATLAS Executive Committee, he could "vouch for the fact" that ATLAS was not controlled by the Perón government, and said that although the CGT was Peronista, ATLAS was not.<sup>58</sup>

One other non-Argentine official of ATLAS, the Costa Rican Héctor Gutiérrez Zamora, also attested to the close association of ATLAS with Peronismo. He said, "We know that Perón is freeing the people of the continent and to be a Peronista is to second him in all things. He is the leader of Latin America, and the great hope of the century."<sup>59</sup>

The Argentine leaders of ATLAS also made clear the Peronista nature of ATLAS. José Espejo, speaking at the January 1953 meeting of the Executive Committee, said that "Justicialismo, of which General Perón and Eva Perón are the leaders and standard bearers, and which is the hope of the Indoamerican masses, is also the banner of ATLAS, which will fight with Justicialismo so that happiness, welfare, and social justice may be the inheritance of all the homes of Latin America."<sup>60</sup>

The CGT-controlled newspaper *La Prensa* made the same point in an editorial of December 22, 1952: "Ideologically, ATLAS aligns itself with the Third Position, conceived by General Perón, in order to act with perfectly equal distance between the two doctrinaire extremisms which dispute the hegemony of the Universe. Practically, it will divide its diverse activities, attacking in its own way and in each country the local problems generated by miscomprehension and the error of avarice of the establishments which utilize the human labor of the American worker."<sup>61</sup>

In 1954, Juan Garone, then secretary-general of ATLAS, said to me that ATLAS supported the Third Position. He also claimed that it was "Justicialista, not Peronista."<sup>62</sup>

## DECLINE IN ATLAS ACTIVITY

We have noted that after the visit of President Dwight Eisenhower's brother Milton to Buenos Aires in 1953, the Perón government modified its denunciation of the United States, and that this change had its impact on ATLAS. Given this change in the Perón government's international position, ATLAS lost much of its importance as an instrument of that government's foreign policy. As a result of this, and of a growing economic crisis in Argentina, the Perón regime had much less interest than previously in financing and otherwise supporting ATLAS.

John Deiner sketched this decline in interest and its results. He said, "By 1955 ATLAS' activities were indeed minimal. . . . One of the last public acts of ATLAS was to have its leaders take part in the ceremonies commemorating Evita Perón's death in July 1955. Aside from symbolic acts such as this, and the carrying on of routine activities such as publishing of A.T.L.A.S., the organization did very little during the final months of the Perón government's stay in power in Argentina."

Deiner continued, "Perón was no longer interested in the organization, and it had no powerful supporters in the government to give it needed funds and official encouragement. As Argentina became beset with internal problems, as the government's conflict with the Church widened and military revolt threatened, the affairs of ATLAS dwindled in importance in the eyes of Peronista officials. These officials no longer had the time nor money for ATLAS. By the time the regime fell, ATLAS was almost inactive."<sup>63</sup>

Certainly, one of the factors that hurt ATLAS during this period was the quarrel that Perón developed with the Roman Catholic Church in the last

months of his 1946–1955 administration. Francisco Colón Gordiany, for instance, told me in September 1955 that he understood that the ATLAS affiliate in Colombia had “suffered some” as a result of Perón’s attack on the Church.<sup>64</sup> The same thing certainly happened in some other countries.

## EXTENT OF ATLAS INFLUENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

Before looking at what happened to ATLAS after the fall of the first Perón regime in September 1955, it is appropriate to look at what support the organization had been able to develop outside of Argentina. In July 1954, Héctor Gutiérrez Zamora, the financial secretary of ATLAS, told me that it had affiliates in all of the Latin American countries except the Dominican Republic.<sup>65</sup> Also, over and over again, ATLAS officials claimed to speak for 18 million members of their organization, a number which John Deiner said “was false.” He added that “ATLAS strength never even reached five million, with well over 80 percent of the members it did have being concentrated in one country: Argentina.”<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, ATLAS had in its ranks CROM, which in the 1920s had been Mexico’s largest central labor organization, but which by the 1950s was only of secondary importance and size. It was one of the two substantial labor groups belonging to ATLAS.

For the most part, where in other countries ATLAS formed a more or less significant affiliate, it did so as a result of splits in previously existing central labor groups. For example, in Colombia, Hernando Rodríguez, head of the Federation of Workers of Cundinamarca (Bogotá, the national capital) quarreled with the Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC), one of the two predominant central labor groups, taking his federation out of the CTC. Under his leadership, the Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) was formed, and it affiliated with ATLAS. However, it was short-lived and it never was able effectively to challenge the CTC or the Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia, in spite of getting some support from the dictatorship of General Rojas Pinilla.<sup>67</sup>

In Chile, according to Juan Garone, ATLAS support centered on the sugar workers’ union of Viñar del Mar. He added that it had “a strong group” in Santiago, but that by 1954 it was “not quite as strong as it might be.” The ATLAS member groups formed a National Confederation of Workers,<sup>68</sup> but it never offered any effective opposition to the Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile (CUTCh) that had brought together most of the country’s unions.

In Costa Rica, the ATLAS group resulted from a split in the *Rerum Novarum* Labor Confederation, which took place when Peronista sympathizers seized control of the confederation’s federation in San José, the national capital. Although for a short while, this split seemed as if it might bring into existence a major (for Costa Rica) national labor group, this did not occur.<sup>69</sup>

In Peru, a handful of leaders of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú, encouraged by the Argentine labor attachés, were won over to Peronismo. Their most important figure was Tomás del Piélagos, head of the Printers Federation. However, the dictatorship of General Manuel Odria, which had decimated the CTP, controlled by the Partido Aprista, did not permit the formation of any central labor organization, Aprista or Peronista, for several years.

In Uruguay, a small group of unions had formed a Confederación General del Trabajo, obviously modeled on the CGT across the Rio de la Plata. However, it never was able to mount a serious challenge to the two central labor organizations of this period, the Unión General de Trabajadores and the Confederación Sindical Uruguaya.

In Cuba, too, the labor movement was divided. The CTC, established in 1939, was divided in 1947 between a large majority controlled by the Auténtico Party and a minority under Communist control. After the seizure of power by General Fulgencio Batista in March 1952, the Auténtico CTC was internally divided between those who wanted to collaborate with him and those who did not, but did not split into competing organizations. In any case, Fernando Pérez Vidal, who "represented" the Cuban workers in ATLAS, had virtually no following in any of the factions of the labor movement.

Although the Confederación Paraguaya de Trabajadores (CPT) acted as host for the meeting that established CUSLA, it did not join ATLAS. Quite to the contrary, it for a while was a member of the ORIT.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, Joviano de Araujo, a leader of the maritime workers, who "represented" the Brazil labor movement at the CUSLA meeting, did not have any role in ATLAS. Rather, he became an official of ORIT.

Representatives of the Bolivian labor movement, particularly of the tin miners, participated in the founding meetings of both CUSLA and ATLAS, but the Bolivian labor movement did not officially join either of those organizations. It remained outside of any international labor grouping. Mario Torres, the second highest figure in the Bolivian miners' federation, who had been a fraternal delegate at the founding congress of ATLAS, said after that meeting: "We had hoped that this new body would assert some independence, would attempt some task other than the dissemination of Argentine propaganda. Possibly it may still do so, but having been present at its birth, I can say that the ATLAS, if not stillborn, is dangerously anemic."<sup>71</sup>

In Ecuador, although an ATLAS National Committee was established, ATLAS had no real base in the country's labor movement, which was at the time divided between the Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador, affiliated with the CTAL, and a small semi-trade union group, the CEDOC of Roman Catholic orientation.

In Guatemala, the labor movement was dominated by the Communists and belonged to CTAL. However, although ATLAS did not succeed in

developing a real affiliate in that country, Peronista activities in Guatemala were sufficient to provoke denunciation from the leaders of the CGTG.<sup>72</sup>

In Haiti, virtually the only significant trade unionist who was a Peronista was Molière Compas. He led a small faction of the labor movement (which in any case was small and weak) that remained a small minority.

In Nicaragua, supporters of ATLAS succeeded in organizing in organizing the Confederación General de Trabajadores. For a short while it seemed to prosper because the Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza, favored it to some degree. However, it never "gained any controlling influence in Nicaragua labor affairs, despite the relatively favorable situation it found there."<sup>73</sup>

In the case of Panama, ATLAS was very vocal in expressing its support for the Panamanians employed in the Canal Zone. However, as John Deiner noted, "The dominant forces in the Panamanian labor movement appear to have rejected ATLAS as being an organization controlled by a foreign power, rather than an organization genuinely interested in all the countries of Latin America."<sup>74</sup>

ATLAS succeeded in getting the affiliation of a small minority group within the labor movement in Puerto Rico, headed by Colón Gordiany, a member of the Puerto Rican Independence Party. However, most unions in the island belonged either to the AFL or the CIO, and the idea of independence was supported only by a small minority of Puerto Ricans.

In Venezuela, the labor movement was very severely persecuted by the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez during the period in which ATLAS was active. However, the Pérez Jiménez government did organize a small group of workers, and it was this element that participated in ATLAS. But, "despite the cooperation of the government, ATLAS could not make any inroads into the trade unions of Venezuela."<sup>75</sup>

John Deiner summed up the scope that ATLAS achieved during its nearly three years of active existence. He wrote, "Most probably the ATLAS organization managed to gain some 125,000 to 170,000 affiliates outside of Argentina during the course of its life. The membership fluctuated during the almost three years of ATLAS existence, and many of those counted as members had little or no importance in the labor affairs of their countries."<sup>76</sup>

## ATLAS AFTER THE FALL OF PERÓN

John Deiner said, "With the fall of the Perón government in September of 1955, ATLAS ended its short, unsuccessful history."<sup>77</sup> However, that was not quite the case. As late as 1963, José Ortiz Petricioli, one of the principal leaders of the Mexican CROM, told me that ATLAS was still in existence, with its headquarters in Buenos Aires, and with Juan Garone still as its secretary-general. Ortiz Petricioli himself, he said, was editor of its paper A.T.L.A.S., which he published in Mexico, as the organ of the Mexican

National Committee of ATLAS. He insisted that National Committees still existed in all of the Latin American countries, and that ATLAS still had affiliated labor confederations in Guatemala and El Salvador.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps this description of the continuation of ATLAS eight years after the overthrow of the first Perón administration was as true as the claim of ATLAS at its prime that it had 18 million members. However, it does indicate that at least a shadow organization continued to exist for some years after ATLAS ceased to have any real significance in the labor movements of Latin America.

When, with the return to power of Perón in 1973, the Argentine CGT, which itself no longer claimed to be affiliated with ATLAS, announced its intention to reestablish it. Nothing in fact, resulted from this announcement.<sup>79</sup>

## NOTES

1. Samuel Baily, *Labor, Nationalism and Politics in Argentina* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 101.

2. For a discussion of Justicialismo, see John Terrill Deiner, "ATLAS: Labor Instrument of Argentine Expansionism Under Perón" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1969), pp. 173–182.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 207–208.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 209–210.

5. Serafino Romualdi, *Presidents and Peons: Recollections of a Labor Ambassador in Latin America* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967), pp. 49–63.

6. See Luis Morones, *El Congreso de Lima: Informe del C. Luis N. Morones, Secretario Gral. de la C.R.O.M., Rendido en el Mitin Celebrado el Día 29 de Febrero en el Teatro Lírico*, (México, DF: Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana, 1948).

7. José Ortiz Petricioli (secretary of press, Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana), interview with the author in Mexico City, August 21, 1963.

8. Deiner, "ATLAS," pp. 198–199.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 211–212.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 202–203.

11. *Comité de Unidad Sindical Latinoamericana*, Buenos Aires, 1952, p. 9.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–15.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–24.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

19. Julio César Sánchez (office manager of Comité de Unidad Sindical Latinoamericano), interview with the author in Buenos Aires, August 4, 1952.

20. Deiner, "ATLAS," pp. 224–232.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 244–245.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

24. Ibid., p. 255.
25. A.T.L.A.S. *Agrupación de Trabajadores Latinoamericanos Sindicalistas: Declaración de Principios y Reglamento*, Buenos Aires, 1952, p. 11.
26. Ibid., pp. 16–20.
27. Ibid., pp. 24–27.
28. Ibid., pp. 27–28.
29. Ibid., pp. 33–34.
30. Juan R. Garone (secretary-general of ATLAS), interview with the author in Buenos Aires, July 14, 1954.
31. Deiner, "ATLAS," p. 255.
32. Ibid., p. 256.
33. Ibid., pp. 260–261.
34. Garone, interview.
35. Deiner, "ATLAS," pp. 285–286.
36. Ibid., p. 265.
37. Ibid., pp. 271–273.
38. Ibid., p. 283.
39. Ibid., pp. 270–271.
40. Ibid., pp. 276–277.
41. Ibid., p. 274.
42. Ibid., pp. 281–282.
43. Sánchez, interview; and José Bonilla Toro (secretary of organization of Comité de Unidad Sindical Latinoamericano), interview with the author in Buenos Aires, August 4, 1952.
44. Garone, interview.
45. Deiner, "ATLAS," p. 268.
46. Ibid., p. 286.
47. Garone, interview.
48. Deiner, "ATLAS," p. 283.
49. Ibid., p. 288.
50. Ibid., p. 291.
51. Ibid., p. 320.
52. Ibid., p. 321.
53. Ibid., p. 262.
54. Ibid., p. 236.
55. Ibid., p. 270.
56. Ibid., p. 263.
57. Ibid., p. 270.
58. Francisco Colón Gordiany (president of Confederación General de Trabajadores Auténtica of Puerto Rico, recording secretary of ATLAS), interview with the author in San Juan, Puerto Rico, September 6, 1955.
59. Deiner, "ATLAS," p. 263.
60. Ibid., pp. 263–264.
61. Ibid., p. 259.
62. Garone, interview.
63. Deiner, "ATLAS," pp. 291–292.
64. Colón Gordiany, interview.
65. Hector Gutiérrez, Zamora (financial secretary of ATLAS), interview with the author in Buenos Aires, July 14, 1954.



66. Deiner, "ATLAS," pp. 292–293.
67. Ibid., pp. 244–245.
68. Garone, interview.
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70. Deiner, "ATLAS," p. 304.
71. *The Militant* (New York), organ of Socialist Workers Party, January 12, 1953, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 4.
72. *Diario de Centro América* (Guatemala City), government newspaper, February 11, 1954.
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77. Ibid., p. 292.
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## CHAPTER 10

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# CLASC and CLAT

In the post-World War II period there developed a segment of the labor movement of Latin America that was influenced by the doctrines and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. It was fostered by and became a part of the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ICCTU), which was before World War II the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions and in the 1960s was renamed the World Confederation of Labor.

The Catholic labor movement had taken its ideological orientation from the teachings of three popes. Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, issued in May 1891, endorsed the right of workers to organize, but warned against the “danger” of Socialism. Pope Pius XI, in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, issued on the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, reiterated the legitimacy of unions from the Church’s point of view. Several of the encyclicals of Pope John XXIII emphasized the social message of the Church, and provided reinforced support for Catholic leadership in the labor movement.

Starting after the issuance of *Rerum Novarum*, there began to develop, principally in Europe, various kinds of organizations of Catholic workers. Many of these were confessional in nature, but there also developed in some countries trade union movements under the inspiration and, to a greater or lesser degree, control of the Church.

Lewis Lorwin, writing in 1953, noted, “Before the advent of Nazism and Fascism, the mainstay of the Christian Trade Union International was in Central and South Europe. Today, the International has no affiliations

there... The main strength of Christian trade unionism is now in France, Belgium and Holland."<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1908 the various national Catholic trade union groups were brought together under the International Christian Trade Union Secretariat. In 1920 that became the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (ICFTU).<sup>2</sup> In 1929, Lewis Lorwin wrote of the ICFTU: "Every three years, a convention is held at which reports are presented on selected topics and resolutions are adopted. Each affiliated national center is free to send as many delegates as it chooses. Voting is on the basis of proportional representation in accordance with membership. An International having one delegate from each affiliated national center is elected by the congress, which elects also an executive committee of five including the general secretary."<sup>3</sup> The ICFTU also had 15 "trade secretariats," which Lorwin said were "little more than bureaus of information."<sup>4</sup>

As a result of Nazi conquest of much of Europe during World War II, the ICFTU was "forced to suspend operations during the war." However, in 1946, it was reestablished, under the new name of International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions.<sup>5</sup> J. P. Serrarens, who had been secretary-general of the ICFTU, was chosen once again for that post after the war, not retiring until 1952.<sup>6</sup>

## EARLY CATHOLIC MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

There were some Catholic-oriented trade unions and "semi trade union" groups in Latin America in the early decades of the 20th century. One of the best known of these was the Federación de Asociaciones Católicas de Empleadas, an organization of women white-collar workers established in Buenos Aires in the 1920s under the patronage of Monseñor Miguel de Andrea. I have written elsewhere about this group that "it carried on combined trade union and mutual benefit activities, and among its many services were cheap, wholesome meals, extensive medical service, vacation resorts and adult education. In 1946 it had some twenty-five thousand members."<sup>7</sup>

In Brazil there was developed a National Confederation of Workers Circles, which was begun in Rio Grande do Sul in 1932 under the leadership of Padre Ludwig Brentano. Although these began as confessional organizations, concentrating on trying to bring workers closer to the church, by the 1950s they were involved in providing courses for preparing Catholic workers for leadership in the trade unions.<sup>8</sup>

In Ecuador there developed the Confederación Ecuatoriana de Obreros Católicos (CEDOC) under the leadership of Pedro Velasco Ibarra. Established in the 1930s, it was for a long time primarily a mutual benefit and confessional organization. However, by the 1960s it had developed into a full-fledged trade union grouping.

After World War II there appeared in several countries Catholic groups that sought principally to work within existing labor movements, rather

than to establish independent Catholic-oriented trade union confederations. Such were *Acción Sindical Argentina*, *Acción Sindical Chilena*, *Acción Sindical Panameña*, and the *Movimiento Sindical Cristiano del Perú*.

In Venezuela, the Catholics who were active in the labor movement were divided in their policies. The considerable majority of the members of the Catholic Social Party Copey who were active in organized labor worked within the dominant *Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela* (CTV). However, a minority established a rival group to the CTV, the *Comité Pro Federación de Trabajadores Organizados de Venezuela* (COFETROV).

### **EARLY YEARS OF CONFEDERACIÓN LATINO AMERICANA DE SINDICALISTAS CRISTIANOS (CLASC)**

Until after World War II, the international Catholic trade union movement had little apparent interest in extending its ranks beyond Europe. Its 12 national affiliates were all European.<sup>9</sup>

However, as early as February 1945, it was reported: "A group called the Catholic Workers Organization of Argentina is planning to convene a Latin American conference of similar groups in March to establish a rival to the Confederation of Latin American Workers (CTAL). The new organization, which is expected to be called the Latin American Federation of Catholics, will aim to include "unions and unorganized workers who do not agree with the leftist doctrines permeating the CTAL."<sup>10</sup>

Nothing apparently came of these plans, which received little encouragement from the ICCTU. It was not until the early 1950s, when a new secretary-general, who was interested in extending the range of the organization beyond Europe, took over the leadership of the Christian Labor International that it got under way organizing activities in Latin America, as well as in Asia and Africa.

One of the earliest results of this attitude of the ICCTU was a meeting held under its patronage in Santiago, Chile in December 1954, which established the CLASC. There were only five national labor groups represented at that meeting.<sup>11</sup>

The honorary president of the congress was the president of the ICCTU, Gaston Tessier, who was present. The limited scope of the new organization was shown by the fact that all five members of the Executive Committee chosen at the Santiago meeting were Chileans. None of them was employed fulltime by the new CLASC.<sup>12</sup>

By 1959, CLASC had expanded considerably. Its member organizations by then were *Acción Sindical Argentina*, *Acción Sindical Boliviana*, *Confederação Nacional dos Círculos Operários do Brasil*, *Acción Sindical Chilena*, the CEDOC of Ecuador, the *Départementale des Syndicats Chrétiens* of Guadeloupe, *Unión Départementale des Syndicats Chrétiens* of French Guyana, the Trade Union Congress of Jamaica, the Union

Départementale des Syndicats Chrétiens of Martinique, the Movimiento Sindical Cristiano del Perú, the Progressieve Werknemers Organisatie of Suriname, Sindicalismo Cristiano del Uruguay, the Comité Único de Sindicalistas Cristianos of Venezuela (predecessor of COFRETOV), Acción Sindical Panameña, the Federación de Uniones de Trabajadores of Curaçao, the Centro Nacional de Promoción Obrera of Mexico, the Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien of Haiti, and the Movimiento Sindicalista Paraguayo.<sup>13</sup>

At its founding meeting, CLASC had chosen as its president José Goldsack of Acción Sindical Chilena. Goldsack had been the principal Latin American figure responsible for the organization of the new Latin American confederation. The third meeting of the Continental Council of CLASC, held in Santiago, Chile in November 1958, ratified the decision of the Executive Committee to make Goldsack's position "permanent," obviously meaning that he would work fulltime for CLASC. This resolution read: "To satisfy the urgent necessity of CLASC to have a leader totally dedicated to CLASC and having obtained the creation of the Fondo de Solidaridad, the Executive Committee unanimously agreed to name as permanent official its President, giving up totally his activities in ASICH [Acción Sindical Chilena], where he functioned as permanent treasurer and national secretary of organization. Thus, together with obtaining a leader dedicated exclusively to the CLASC, the president was relieved of all subordination to the ASICH."<sup>14</sup>

However, the same meeting of the Continental Council also ratified the decision of the Executive Committee that had "considered it indispensable to have the services of another permanent official to undertake the work of organization and the expansion of Christian trade unionism in Latin America." To that post they named Emilio Máspero.<sup>15</sup> He had been a young leader of the miners' union of Argentina, and was active in Acción Sindical Argentina.<sup>16</sup>

Máspero was soon to become secretary-general of CLASC, and emerged as indisputably its principal figure. He was an indefatigable organizer and he became the unchallenged public spokesman for the organization.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF CLASC-CLAT (CENTRAL LATINO AMERICANA DE TRABAJADORES)**

At its inception, the headquarters of CLASC was in Santiago, Chile. It remained there until after the Fifth Congress of the organization in October 1966, when it was decided to move it to Caracas, Venezuela.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, as CLASC grew, its organizational structure was modified to adapt to that growth.

That organizational structure originally provided three levels of leadership. As was the case with most similar organizations, the highest body of CLASC was its Congress (or Conference), consisting of delegates from

each of its various national affiliates. The Congress met more or less regularly every three years.

Between congresses, the supreme body of the organization was the Consejo Continental, with one member from each affiliated group. It met several times a year. It had extensive powers to make policy and pass judgment on the relations of CLASC with its member organizations. Its name was subsequently changed to Consejo Latino Americano.

The day-to-work of the organization was in the hands of an Executive Committee. The Third Continental Council defined the Executive Committee's competence as being

[t]he highest authority...in the periods between the Council and another or between a Council and the Congress and vice-versa.... However, in all those matters in which a pronouncement of the members of the Council is required, the Executive Committee must make the necessary consultation with the Councilors, except in case of a resolution that must be made so rapidly that no previous consultation is possible, in which case the Executive Committee must at least give previous notice and receive approval of the Counselor of the organizations that will be affected by the emergency decision.... The resolutions that the Executive Committee adopts must in this case be communicated to the other Counselors.<sup>18</sup>

The Fifth Congress of CLASC provided for a restructuring of the top leadership of the organization. Although the Congress remained, as before, the sovereign body of the confederación, in between its meetings there were three other bodies responsible for leading CLASC, instead of the two that had at first existed.

Between congresses, the second most powerful body, as had been the case before, was the Continental Council, rechristened the Latin American Council of Workers (Consejo Latinoamericano de Trabajadores), consisting of the presidents of all of the national bodies affiliated with the CLASC. It tended to meet about once every year and a half.

Between Council meetings, there was the Latin American Executive Committee which, in 1968, had 15 members, with 12 countries represented in it. The Executive Committee met every six months.

Finally, the day-to-day work of the CLASC was in the hands of the Latin American Bureau, "which forms part of the Executive Committee." It had five members from five different countries, all of whom resided in Caracas. It was "seconded" by a Secretariat, "composed of functionaries, technicians and employees, also from various countries of the Continent."

The central office of CLASC in Caracas by the late 1960s had seven different departments: organization, education and formation, information and publications, technical matters, international relations, documentation and trade union information, and the Latin American Institute of Cooperation and Development. The last of these constituted a legally



recognized foundation, "to aid all the trade union organizations in plans for self-financing and in all kinds of projects for trade union services and activities."<sup>19</sup>

In 1968, the Secretariat consisted of a secretary-general, and assistant secretary-general, a secretary of finances, and two executive secretaries.<sup>20</sup>

## IDEOLOGY OF CLASC

Clearly, from the beginning the leaders of CLASC saw their organization as differing ideologically from the other trade union groups that were competing for the support of the Latin American workers. This position was put forth, among other places, in a report that CLASC submitted to the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops, which took place in Medellín, Colombia in 1968.

In that document, the CLASC leaders argued that Latin American trade unionism

generally has been playing the card of officialism in collaborationism with those in power, without valuing their own personality as a representative organization of the workers. With rare exceptions, trade unionism has not had any clear and methodical vision of its role in the full development of our people and in the integration of our nations. Rather, there has been a trade unionism centering on economic demands, without a strategy of substantive change in economic, social, cultural, political structures. Trade unionism in general in Latin America has been the product of importation but not of original creation of the Latin American workers themselves.

This report continued:

One can affirm that Latin American trade unionism has also lacked a scale of more or less clear values, which gives it effective contents particularly with regard to its concept of man and society. Also, never has trade unionism, saving with rare exceptions, proposed the problem of the social revolution as the preliminary step for the integral development of Latin America, but instead has become bureaucratic and conformist, bourgeois and corrupt, particularly in the most privileged sectors of the workers, breaking all solidarity with the more disadvantaged workers.

In contrast to these ills of contemporary Latin American trade unionism, CLASC provided "trade union action with a clear concept of man and society, inspired by Christian and humanist values."<sup>21</sup>

On another occasion, Emilio Máspero elaborated on what that meant in practical terms. He wrote:

In the terms of Christian trade unionism, the noun is trade unionism, the adjective is Christian. We want trade unionism, that is to say, we want to organize all the workers for the integral and collective promotion of the laborers and rural classes,

the social, economic, moral, political, on the human, cultural, national and international plane. But the type of trade unionism that we want to effect is characterized by the adjective Christian. The term, Christian, as we use it has no sectarian, religious, ecclesiastical, theological or dogmatical implications. We use the term to refer to the social philosophy and ethic of Christianity, as they are projected on the trade union plane.

Máspero continued:

Christian trade unionism is not in any way sectarian, it is not independent on any ecclesiastical authority, nor does it put before itself the specific apostolic Catholic Action. In the Christian trade union organizations of Latin America, one does not find any discrimination either religious or ecclesiastical. . . . And thus it is that we find both among the leaders and among the members, workers of all different faiths without this affecting their membership in any way.<sup>22</sup>

Another member of the CLASC leadership, in explaining the ideological orientation of the organization, said that those who founded CLASC felt that the trade union movement that existed when it was established was too purely oriented toward an economic point of view, merely working for increases in wages and the like. CLASC, in contrast, felt the need for a labor group which would be the vanguard of social change in the region, and which would pay special attention to those groups of workers who made up the majority of the workers of Latin America, but they felt were overlooked by ORIT and CTAL. These were the agricultural workers, residents of the slums around the Latin American cities, and the unemployed, and it was these groups that CLASC particularly sought to serve.<sup>23</sup> However, there seems to be little evidence that the nature of the membership of the CLASC affiliates differed substantially from that of its rivals.

CLASC leaders constantly emphasized that their organization was "revolutionary." Thus, the Fourth Congress of the organization in 1962 had its slogan "The Christian Workers, Ferment and Vanguard of the Revolution of Latin America." The delegates there signed what was called the "Acta de la Revolución Social Cristiano."<sup>24</sup>

The functioning of CLASC was posited on the belief, Máspero put it, that "Latin America is living the most revolutionary period, the most intensive and extensive that Latin American man has ever known. The foundations of the existing order are being rocked with a vehemence never before experienced."

Máspero added:

We would like to make it clear once and for all that it is neither international Communism nor the demagoguery of politicians nor the aroused emotions of our youth, which is the source of the revolutionary progress in Latin America. . . . The social revolution surges as a historical fact provoked by the very reality of Latin America itself, and since the roots have its causes in the current economic, juridic,

social and political structures and in the most basic needs of human beings, who in the space age have not been able to procure even the most fundamental material requirement of the dignity of human beings.<sup>25</sup>

CLASC, and particularly Emilio Máspero, were at first very well disposed toward the Castro revolution in Cuba. However, by 1964, its early enthusiasm had subsided. In commenting on a May Day proclamation issued by a group of trade union leaders exiled by the Castro regime, CLASC issued a statement proclaiming its solidarity with the workers and people of Cuba, "with those who are in exile, but above all with the workers and people who are in Cuba." It expressed its conviction that a democratic revolution in Cuba "is not far away." Finally, it said it was "totally in accord" with a demand by the Cuban exiled trade unionist groups that "all foreign military forces must be expelled from Cuba."<sup>26</sup> In 1967, CLASC noted the establishment of Solidaridad de Trabajadores Cubanos in Caracas, Venezuela, "constituted by a group of Christian trade unionists who wish 'to give an authentic reply to the grave and profound problems of the Cuban working class.'" It was headed by Carlos Moris, a former official of CLASC.<sup>27</sup>

An important component of the ideology of CLASC was what its leaders themselves called "Latin American nationalism." In what they called the "Letter of Rio de Janeiro," the Consejo Latinoamericano of CLASC expounded on this theme.

The Letter of Rio de Janeiro stated:

A multitude of political and military pacts tie us to the USA, innumerable economic, commercial, cultural and other links of different kinds give rise to colonialist interdependence. Panamericanism inspired in the Monroe Doctrine 'American for Americans' has been the institutionalizing instrument that has permitted the USA to maintain the predominance of its interests in all Latin America, disguised as humanitarian objectives: consolidating democracy, overcoming misery and developing our countries. Panamericanism has failed. It has not served to consolidate the democracies or overcome misery, or bring rapid and integral development of our peoples. Panamericanism has been solely a unilateral policy of the USA to safeguard its interests, its security and to maintain a convenient mask behind which to infiltrate and impose on Latin American appearance, a destiny and a direction that has nothing to do with Latin American interests.

The Letter of Rio de Janeiro then applied this belief in Latin American nationalism to the trade union field. It went on to say that

Panamericanism has determined all the system of relations between Latin America and North America on all levels including the trade union level. All functions, dynamism and reason for existence of the ORIT correspond definitively to the projection of this policy of predominance of the interests of the U.S.A. in the trade union field, seeking to mold, influence and monopolize the organization of the

workers of our countries in the service of a policy and of a system that has been the permanent cause of our disunity and of humility dependencies that must be definitively overcome. The ORIT is already condemned to disappear because it does not respond to the historic process of Latin America.<sup>28</sup>

## EXPANSION OF CLASC

In the 1960s, in a considerable degree due to the activity of Emilio Máspero, the Confederación Latino Americana de Sindicalistas Cristianos experienced substantial growth. It came to have affiliated organizations in most of the Latin American countries, and also made some headway in the union movements of the English, French, and Dutch-speaking territories in the Caribbean area.

The expansion of CLASC was reflected in the third issue in May 1967 of a periodical it established in Caracas, which by then had become its headquarters. It carried news about CLASC affiliates in 12 countries: Bolivia (Acción Sindical Boliviana), Nicaragua (Movimiento Campesino Venezolano Cristiano), Uruguay (Acción Sindical Uruguaya), Colombia (Acción Colombia), the Dominican Republic (Confederación Autónoma de Sindicatos Cristianos), Dominica (Dominican Amalgamated Workers Union), Costa Rica (Federación de Obreros y Campesinos Cristianos Costarricenses), and Paraguay (Central Cristiana de Trabajadores), Mexico (Comisión Pro Federación Campesina Nacional), as well as organizations in Honduras, El Salvador, and Panama whose names were not given. By this time, too, CLASC had at least one Latin American "trade secretariat" affiliated with it, the Federación de Trabajadores Textiles de América Latina.<sup>29</sup>

In most cases, the CLASC affiliate was a minority group in a particular country's labor movement. However, in at least two instances, the CLASC group was the single most important trade union organization, at least for some time. This was the case with the Confederación Autónoma de Sindicatos Cristianos of the Dominican Republic, and the National Federation of Christian Trade Unions in Belize. In a third case, Ecuador, the CEDOC, although not becoming the largest central labor organization in the country, did become one of the three major trade union bodies in that republic.

In at least one case, the affiliation of a national labor group with CLASC and the ICCTU had little to do with a shared Christian ideology. This was the Trade Union Council (TUC) of Jamaica. The TUC had originally been established under the aegis of the People's National Party (PNP), the island's first modern political party. However, in the early 1950s there was a split in that party, when some of its leaders, including most of those controlling the TUC, were accused of being Communist influenced and finally were expelled from the party. The PNP organized a rival to the TUC, which quickly took the TUC's place as one of Jamaica's two major central

labor organizations. Subsequently, the TUC leaders, who were not in fact Communists, withdrew the council from the World Federation of Trade Unions, because of objections from the PNP's new trade union body but were not admitted to the new ICFTU. So, seeking international support, they applied for, and received, admission to the ICCTU and the CLASC. This affiliation lasted for only a few years.

The acceptance of the Jamaican TUC into its ranks was a reflection of CLASC's interest in expanding into the colonial (or recently ex-colonial) areas in and around the Caribbean as well as into the Latin American republics. We have earlier noted that even in its earliest years CLASC had affiliates in the French (Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana) and Dutch (Aruba, Curaçao, and Dutch Guiana) territories of that area. However, it was much less successful in recruiting in the English-speaking countries of the region.

Aside from the Jamaican TUC, which remained in CLASC for only a few years, its only trade union group of substance in the Commonwealth Caribbean was in Belize (British Honduras) where for a while it had in its ranks that country's largest federation. For a couple of years the head of that federation was given a special post in the English-speaking Caribbean. However, the results of his efforts were meager in the extreme.

One other Caribbean territory in which CLASC-CLAT established an organization was Puerto Rico, the Congreso Puertorriqueño de Trabajadores.<sup>30</sup> However, the great majority of the organized workers there belonged to the AFL-CIO.

In two cases, major national trade union confederations that had begun under Catholic influence refused to join CLASC. These were the Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia (UTC) and the Confederación Costarricense de Trabajadores Rerum Novarum of Costa Rica.

Both the UTC and the Rerum Novarum confederation had been established in the 1940s. Although both were founded under the Catholic Church influence, neither wanted to become or be considered confessional organizations, but rather to be normal trade union bodies with their own particular philosophy. When steps were taken in the late 1940s to establish a rival to the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, they were invited to participate in this move, and so became members of the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores (CIT), and subsequently of ORIT. Consequently, when CLASC was founded as a specifically Catholic-oriented Latin American labor confederation, they refused to join it.

For a time, the CLASC leaders felt that they had a chance of winning the UTC to its ranks. Thus, the Third Continental Council of CLASC in November 1958 resolved that that body "after analyzing the spirit and activities undertaken by the UTC, considers that this estimable organization embodies the principles and methods of action of Christian trade unionism which are advocated by the ICCTU and the CLASC and decides also

with all means available, on a policy of close relations between the UTC and International Christian trade unionism."<sup>31</sup> However, as we have indicated, CLASC finally gave up its overtures to the UTC and established its own group in Colombia. In 1981, the Cundinamarca provincial unit of the UTC broke away and joined the CLASC-CLAT group, the Confederación General de Trabajadores.<sup>32</sup>

Much the same thing happened in Costa Rica. Although we have no such information about a CLASC approach to the Rerum Novarum Confederation as about its advances to the UTC, its origins under the leadership of a Catholic priest, Padre Benjamín Núñez, and its name both made it an organization that CLASC would regard as a natural affiliate. However, there, too, the Costa Rican union refused to give up its association with ORIT and join CLASC. As a consequence CLASC organized its own affiliate in Costa Rica.

CLASC continued to expand after it changed its name to CLAT. By the time of the Eight Congress of CLAT in December 1982 in Bogotá, Colombia, there were reported to be delegates present from "35 national organizations."<sup>33</sup>

One of the more notable recruits to the CLAT in the 1980s was that among bank workers of Brazil. The federations of those workers in the states of São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Mato Grosso voted to join CLAT, as well as the World Congress of Labor and its bank workers' "trade secretariat."<sup>34</sup> This was the first time that a substantial Brazilian trade union group had joined CLAT and WCL.

## **CLASC PRESENTATION BEFORE INTERNATIONAL BODIES**

From its inception, CLASC presented the point of view of Latin America Catholic trade unionists before various international organizations—the United Nations and its dependent bodies, and various intergovernmental organizations in the Western Hemisphere. For instance, in November 1958, the Consejo Continental of CLASC resolved to ask the ICCTU to include Pedro Mario Zañartu, S. J. as a member of its delegation to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, "for the presentation of Latin American problems."<sup>35</sup>

The June 1967 issue of the CLASC newspaper *CLASC* indicated the kind of organizations in which CLASC had or sought to have a voice. It noted that "Social Christian peasant leaders participated in the VII meeting of the Governors of the Inter-American Development Bank." It also observed that "CLASC participated in the first meeting of the Working Group of ALALC," the intergovernmental organization that was seeking to develop a plan for a Latin American common market. That newspaper also wrote that CLASC had recently appealed to the ILO of the UN to establish an investigating commission to look into the violations of trade

union freedom being carried on by the Argentine government of General Onganía.<sup>36</sup>

On another occasion, when the government of Venezuela was considering joining the Andean Pact, a move toward greater economic unity among the Andean countries of South America, CLASC (by then, CLAT) went on record as urging the Venezuelans to do so. Emilio Máspero explained that Venezuela's entry "would represent an important positive step for Venezuela and above all for the laboring classes." At the same time, Máspero noted that CLAT had "discussed and agreed upon a proposal to request the participation of workers in the integration process, above all economic integration, and particularly in the Andean Pact."<sup>37</sup>

On some occasions, the CLASC leaders were able to use help from inter-governmental organizations to finance its own activities. Thus, in November 1959 it used labor education seminars of the UNESCO and ILO that financed the presence of CLASC leaders from various countries in Quito, Ecuador to hold the Third Congress of CLASC in Quito at approximately the same time.<sup>38</sup>

### CLASC-CLAT TRADE UNION TRAINING

From the beginning, CLASC put major emphasis on trade union leadership training, that is, preparing the leaders of their affiliated groups to operate effectively, both in organizational terms and in collective bargaining. One of the more interesting early examples of this CLASC activity took place in Quito, Ecuador in November 1959. UNESCO, the United Nations organization in the educational field, organized a labor training seminar in Quito, to which a number of CLASC leaders from various countries had been invited. The CLASC Executive Committee also arranged with the ILO to sponsor an "International Training Course for Workers" in Quito at which CLASC was a co-host.<sup>39</sup>

Subsequently, CLASC organized these training activities on a less ad hoc and more institutionalized basis. The Seventh Meeting of the Continental Council in March 1964 adopted a resolution in which it noted: "The CLASC has taken upon itself the task of promoting on an international basis various kinds of aid for financing these services of trade union training in all of the countries of Latin America, which have already been taking concrete form in various countries."

This same resolution noted: "On an internal plane, the CLASC has sponsored the establishment also of Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sindicales (IIES) del Sur, with its headquarters in Santiago Chile, the Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sindicales (IIES) del Caribe, with its headquarters in Caracas, and the Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Sindicales, with its headquarters in Guatemala."<sup>40</sup>

An official report on the activities of CLASC in 1968 said: "More than 70% of the resources of the CLASC are destined in all of Latin America to



the formation and training of leaders, activists and members of the trade union organizations. In 1968, around 30,000 officials, activists and members of union have received formation and training in the national and international educational centers of the CLASC."

This reported added: "Various trade union leaders have used special scholarships in Europe, Canada and Latin America to continue technical training in various subjects related to trade union life. . . . Trade union leaders of organizations affiliated with CLASC also took special courses in trade union schools in Oxford, England, in Holland, in Switzerland and France."<sup>41</sup>

Over the years the leadership training programs of CLASC-CLAT expanded. In 1979, it was reported that there were 21 national and provincial training institutions run by CLAT affiliates.<sup>42</sup>

Frequently, the various training institutions of CLASC-CLAT produced their own teaching materials. Perhaps characteristic, at least for the period of CLASC, were two mimeographed pamphlets produced and used by the Instituto de Formación Social Sindical of the Asociación Sindical Argentina, the Argentine affiliate of CLASC. One of these was entitled "La Huelga y la Ley Moral" ("The Strike and Moral Law"); the second was "La Lucha de Clases" ("The Class Struggle"). Both of these approached their subjects from the point of view of Social Catholicism. They both defended the right to strike, basing their position on the Social Catholic concept of social justice. The one dealing with the class struggle, however, also denounced the concept as developed in Marxist theory.<sup>43</sup>

The Sixth Congress of CLAT in 1971 decided to establish what it called the Universidad de los Trabajadores de América Latina (University of the Workers of Latin America—UTAL) as the highest level of its training program. CLAT described the function of the UTAL as being "the center of superior training and development of studies and research, both of which supported by a well organized process of documentation and information."<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps typical of the kind of activities undertaken by the UTAL was a Colloquium on Economy and Workers Participation in Management that it ran in July 1981. Among the people participating in that session were Juan Lechín, longtime head of the Bolivian miners' union, Ruy Brito de Oliveira, ex-president of the Confederation of Bank and Insurance Workers of Brazil and other authorities from Chile, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Germany, the United States, and Yugoslavia.<sup>45</sup>

## TACTICS OF CLASC

Although the ultimate objective of CLASC was to have a central labor organization affiliated with it in every Latin American and Caribbean country, it was clear from the beginning that this could not come to pass quickly. As the Latin American Council of CLASC itself admitted, "Christian trade

unionism has come relatively late in the trade union struggles of Latin America." It was necessary, therefore, "to recover in an intelligent way the time lost."

Different tactics would be needed depending of the situation in the various countries. Although the objective must be to have "central labor organizations, which as a majority groups reflect the support of the workers and their organized force for carrying out the ideas and programs of Christian trade unionism," there might be different ways to bring this about in different countries.

There were basically two ways in which such a central labor group could be established. If CLASC began work in a situation in which the trade union movement was just getting started, or in which a Catholic-oriented central labor group had already been established, such a national labor confederation could more or less immediately join CLASC. On the other hand, if (as was true in most countries) Catholic-oriented workers groups were latecomers to an already existing labor movement of some consequence, they would have to work within existing union groups to seek adherents and build up organizational strength.

The CLASC Latin American Council said: "Whether these central organizations will be the result of direct Christian trade union organization or through organized penetration, or through coordinated mixed formulas, this must be fairly determined by the Christian workers of each country, but with common insistence of all that it is necessary to create our movement from the base to the top in the most efficacious and most authentic way possible."

This process of establishing national central labor organizations affiliated with CLASC must be coordinated, regardless of which tactic was used, the Council said. "The unity of conception and of objectives must be made clear through the unity of services and unity in action, which are indispensable in each country."<sup>46</sup>

CLASC did not give up either that it would be able to attract to its ranks national labor groups that were affiliated with other international organizations or did not belong to any of them. An indication of this was the First Trade Union Conference for the Development and Integration of Latin America held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in May 1968.

Despite the name of this conference, its total emphasis was on the need for unity of the labor movement in Latin America. There were present not only CLASC affiliates' representatives, but also delegates from the Central Obrera Boliviana, which did not belong to any international grouping, and the Catholic element in the leadership of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela, which belonged to ICFTU and its American affiliate, ORIT. All of the speakers at this meeting stressed the need for unifying the Latin American labor movements into a single organization, although there is no indication that any concrete steps were proposed or agreed upon to bring this about.<sup>47</sup>

## CLASC AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Clearly the Confederación Latino Americana de Sindicalistas Cristianos was from its inception an organization of Roman Catholic inspiration. From time to time it reasserted or redefined its relations with the Church.

In November 1958, the third meeting of CLASC's Continental Council adopted a resolution entitled "Relations of the CLASC and its affiliated organizations with Catholic activity, political and social." This document started by saying, "The CLASC, in continental terms, must continue its relations with the Holy See, with the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) and inform the Bishops of America of its activities. This information does not imply a confessional position for the CLASC."

The resolution went on to say: "The CLASC must not avoid the concrete affirmation that its trade union mission is inspired by Christian doctrine and morality. . . . Our existence as a distinct continental trade union central is only justified because it offers a distinct kind of trade unionism; otherwise it would be unacceptable division of the working masses."

The resolution continued: "The CLASC will seek with its maximum efforts to have contacts and the maximum possible coordination with Catholic Action and its specialized branches, particularly with the Juventud Obrera Católica (Catholic Labor Youth), seeking to avoid prejudicial controversies and develop the necessary collaboration in favor of the working class."<sup>48</sup>

More or less typical of CLASC's specifically "Christian" identification was a pamphlet it published in 1964, entitled *Los Trabajadores, Fermento y Vanguardia de la Revolución*. In that, it defined "Christian trade unionism" as being "ideological," "free," and "revolutionary." It noted that "Christian trade unionism is ideological. . . . It has chosen the social philosophy of Christianity and the models—economic, social and political—which inspire this integral conception of men and society."<sup>49</sup>

Four years later, CLASC published a document that still emphasized its Catholic nature, but sounded a rather different note from what had been customary. This was an "Open Letter" addressed to Pope Paul VI on the occasion of his visit to the meeting of Catholic bishops in Medellín, Colombia in 1968.

This Open Letter starts out by addressing the pope as "Brother Paul," saying that it is so addressed "because it is thus that we see and feel you, brother with us in a common and collective destiny." It praises throughout the social message it sees Pope Paul as issuing, particularly in his Pastoral Letter "The Development of the Peoples." However, the letter several times warns Pope Paul that during his visit there will be "occult political, financial, intellectual, cultural and ecclesiastical forces" who will seek to have him give a pat on the back "to all their causes, all of their privileges, all their crimes against the poor and against the people." It complains in various ways that in spite of the Pope's fine words, the Church all too

frequently has listened to the forces of reaction and privilege. The back cover of the pamphlet in which this Open Letter is published proclaims CLASC to be "Ferment and Vanguard of the Social Revolution in Latin America."<sup>50</sup>

## TRANSFORMATION FROM CLASC TO CLAT

In November 1971, CLASC changed its name to Central Latino Americano de Trabajadores (CLAT). John Windmuller traced the background of this change and we shall see other significant implications of this alteration.

Windmuller noted that ICCTU, with which CLASC was affiliated, had been under pressure to "secularize." This arose from the fact that after World War II it sought to break out of its confinement to Europe, and had become interested in acquiring affiliates in Asia and Africa as well as in Latin America.

In Asia and Africa the ICCTU was frequently organizing workers who were not only not Catholics, but were not Christians, being Moslems, Hindus or some other religious persuasion. The appeal of a strictly Catholic trade union group to such workers was virtually nonexistent. As a result, the regional trade union groups that it was successful in organizing in Africa and Asia did not use "Christian" in their titles at all. In 1968, the ICCTU itself changed its name to World Confederation of Labor (WCL).

Windmuller traced the details of this transformation of the ICCTU-WCL:

Paralleling the developments of Africa and Asia was the decreasing use of references to God and to Christian principles in WCL publications. Already in 1964, this trend was carried to the point of omitting from the action program and declaration of principles adopted by that year's congress almost all mention of Christianity or, for that matter, of any creed. In October 1968 the last references to the social principles of Christianity disappeared from the constitution and the very name of the organization was neutralized.<sup>51</sup>

The change in ideological orientation of the WCL was shown in a resolution of its 20th Congress that said "that the Declaration of Principles make the WCL a spiritual but non-denominational organization advocating a pluralism of inspiration is a human wealth and an important contribution to social thought and trade union action; it is in favor of religious freedom; without imposing a specific religion, it defends the workers' right to profess and practice a religion or to abstain from any religious commitment."<sup>52</sup>

At its Sixth Congress in Caracas in November 1971, CLASC followed the lead of the world organization, and changed its name to CLAT. An article in the Caracas magazine *Summa* explaining this change noted:

"Continuing the same process of developing its independent and innovating identity and personality, the Sixth Conference decided to eliminate the 'C' for Christian with the purpose of classifying exactly what CLASC is and does, without preconceived notions or misunderstandings of any sort, allowing all workers to see its character and personality, as it is in its actual workings and orientation."

The article went on to say that "CLAT represents, or attempts to represent, the movement of workers to organize themselves and become involved in the prospect of organizing the people, seeking the establishment of a center of his historical power of the people that can radically change the present relationship between forces and power and directly confront capitalist society in order to pave the way for a new society."<sup>53</sup>

### THE NEW IDEOLOGY OF CLAT

There is no doubt that the change in name from CLASC to CLAT reflected a fundamental alteration of the ideology of the organization. That this was the deliberate intention of the CLASC-CLAT leaders was indicated by the fact that "[t]o coordinate and push the process of ideological elaboration the Congress of 1971 had decided to form a Latin American Policy Commission that should provide the means for its effective development."<sup>54</sup>

In his 200-page report to the Seventh Congress of CLAT in December 1977, Emilio Máspero expounded at length on its ideology as it had evolved at that point. His presentation contrasted in several basic ways with what had been the principles espoused by CLASC during the first quarter of a century of its existence.

One of the most striking aspects of the Máspero report is its almost total lack of reference to Social Catholicism as expounded by several popes as the philosophical basis of the organization. The only reference to religion in Máspero's report deals with "the churches" in an "objective" manner, without any indication that the CLAT had a particular relationship with any particular church.

Máspero, after noting "the emergence of irregular armed groups in urban centers which, using the methods appropriate for the Mafia have constituted so-called 'popular tribunals' to judge the conduct and function of workers' leaders, and summarily judging them, thus liquidating all possibility of internal democracy and self rule of the workers," went on to say that "[s]imilar phenomena—although with diverse and complex motives—one finds in the churches (Catholic as well as Protestant) which operate in Latin America."

Máspero continued: "Growing penetration of Marxist-Leninist ideologies seeks to utilize the elements of the Churches as 'bridges' to introduce these ideas in the Organizations of the Movement of the Workers among the peasants and the shantytowns. The behavior of certain clerical

groups generally in this way is not very serious or mature, very unstable and with traditional characteristics of clerical paternalism and control."

Máspero then went on to note: "On the other hand, one cannot ignore the fact that within the Churches there are elements with profound concern and support for the struggles of the workers and peoples. The most mature and responsible current appears to be that which feeds, deepens and radicalizes that support in the best of Christian thought, without allowing itself to be distracted by the 'fashion' that pushes not a few feverishly to assume that Marxism-Leninism is the new 'Bible' of Latin American liberation."

The CLAT secretary-general finished this section of his report by noting, "The strategists of the 'cold war' increasingly attempt to involve the Churches in their imperialist grip."<sup>55</sup>

As described by Emilio Máspero, his organization, in being transformed from the Confederación Latino Americana de Sindicalistas Cristianos into the Central Latino Americana de Trabajadores, substituted what might best be called Third Worldism for Catholic social doctrine as its basic ideology. He argued that division of the world that had prevailed after World War II between the capitalist West and the Marxist-Leninist East had been superseded by the division between the developed North and the underdeveloped South.

This shift had profound impact on the world trade union movement, according to Máspero. CLAT—and on a worldwide scale, the World Confederation of Labor—represented the spokesmen for the South in the new alignment of forces, whereas ORIT and ICFTU spoke for the Capitalist West and the World Federation of Trade Unions, and CPUSTAL spoke for the East. The future of the world labor movement rested clearly with CLAT and the WCL, according to Máspero.<sup>56</sup>

CLAT continued to reject the two competing currents in the world—and Latin American—trade unionism, but it did so on a different basis from that put forward by CLASC. Now, CLAT put itself forward as the defender of the workers of the Third World rather than as the advocate of the philosophy and ideology of Social Catholicism.

Emilio Máspero clearly stated this position in his report to the CLAT Seventh Congress:

The non-aligned countries struggle against underdevelopment and are determined to defend their material and human resources and exercise a growing influence in the great decisions of the world, although for that they have to cross ideological frontiers, the zones of imperialist influence, the military blocs and commercial barriers that impede a new and more just international order. The historic step that marks the countries, peoples and workers of the Third World is that of LIBERATION. The trade union expression of the Third World is CMT (Confederación Mundial del Trabajo)...In the Latin American Continent, the CLAT and not a few Independent Organizations are identified with the historic lines of the Third World.<sup>57</sup>

Máspero set forth at some length the ideology that CLAT thought appropriate for the labor movements and peoples of the Third World, particularly Latin America. He started out by repudiating the ideas and institutions of the First and Second worlds. Of the first of these, he said: "The capitalist and oligarchic system dominant in our Latin American society has converted on a permanent basis the matter of law and liberty into a private luxury to make it possible to exploit the workers, to continue developing a society that every day is more unjust, more inequitable, more repressive, more alienating, more manipulating of man and of the workers."

Concerning the Marxist-Leninists, Máspero said:

The crisis of human rights [which] involved all of humanity, has demonstrated to all of the workers of Latin America how the Marxist-Leninists and the Communists in power in more than a sixth of the world have ended up being like the fascists of capitalism. Human rights are matters of State and nobody has the possibility of demanding respect for these rights—the same as in fascist capitalism—because that is considered as foreign intromission in the internal affairs of the State. This is the typical totalitarian conception of the State, of society, of the Nation in which man, the workers, the peoples, lose their rights and of their liberties.<sup>58</sup>

In place of ideologies of the other major strains of world trade unionism, CLAT put forward its own view of "[t]he new society as the workers wish and understand it." In his report to the Seventh Congress of CLAT, Emilio Máspero sketched in broad terms "[t]he new society of the workers that will be characterized by three fundamental elements, indissolvable and complementary."

The first of these fundamental elements was "[t]he socialization of the means of production and distribution together with the socialization of the means of power and the socialization of culture, science and technology."

The second fundamental element was "[t]he self government conceived of as government of firms by the workers, but also of the economy and society by the people. Self government responds to the fundamental necessity that responsibility, justice and liberty rest with the workers. Self government by its dynamics creates a new type of social relations based on equality and solidarity."

Another fundamental element of CLAT ideology sketched by Máspero was "[t]he democratic planning that permits elaboration, decision and control of the general economic process, to subordinate it to the satisfaction of the needs of the population, harmonizing the satisfaction of the needs of individual with social needs."<sup>59</sup>

The CLAT proclaimed its support for "participatory democracy." Máspero said that it "[c]an and must inspire creatively new formulas and experiments of control by the organized workers in the development of the society, economy, culture, technology and science, of the state." He added



that CLAT "has always maintained that political parties have their appropriate role to play in the democratic development of our region. Without them, the functioning and consolidation of an effective pluralist democracy would be impossible."

However, the labor movement must be independent of political parties. Máspero argued that "the majority of political parties, whatsoever their ideological inspiration, prepare themselves to make ever more rigid their control over Trade Union and Popular organizations.... The workers in general... do not accept the generalized scheme of the Political Parties whereby they can do nothing without the party, and they must do everything with the party."<sup>60</sup>

In the years following its change of name, CLAT put particular emphasis on the support of democracy—political, social, trade union, cultural, and of the people. On the occasion of the Seventh Congress, in San José, Costa Rica in November 1977, which it advertised as a Latin American Conference on the Rights and Freedoms of Workers and Their Organizations," it issued a "Declaration of the Rights and Freedoms of the Workers and Their Organizations." A year later, in November 1978, it summoned and organized an "Assembly of Latin American Workers and Peoples in Panama, which adopted a "Latin American Letter of Rights and Freedoms of the Workers and the Peoples."

The San José meeting appears to have been a largely in-house assembly of CLAT. However, the Panama City conference a year later was more broadly based. In addition to organizations affiliated with CLAT a variety of other groups signed the "Letter" adopted there. These included the National Council of Bishops of Brazil, the Vicaría de Solidaridad of the Catholic Church in Chile, Permanent Assembly for Defense of Human Rights of Peru, and the CTV, which was affiliated with ORIT, not with CLAT. Also observer delegates to the Panama meeting included representatives of the Human Rights Division of the United Nations, the ILO, the Latin American Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church, Amnesty International, and the Washington Office on Latin America.

The Panama document was a somewhat enlarged version of the one adopted in San José the year before. "The Fundamental Rights of the Workers," "The Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the Workers," and "Fundamental Rights and Freedom of the People," were all adopted at the Panama meeting.<sup>61</sup>

## RESURGENCE OF SOCIAL CATHOLICISM

After about a decade of more or less ignoring its Social Catholic origins and ideas, CLAT once again stressed its loyalty to those ideas and its association with Roman Catholic Church. As CLAT itself noted, "Since 1978 CLAT has increased its relations with the Catholic Bishops of Latin America and many National Bishops' Conferences. Some of the areas of common

interest have been: Social Teachings of the Church, Human Rights, Civilization and Culture."

This modification of its previous more or less secular orientation was made clear by a series of "Colloquia" on the Church and Labor held at CLAT headquarters in Caracas and in Costa Rica and Colombia. It also was reflected in an audience of CLAT leaders with Pope John Paul II: "A delegation of six members of the Executive Committee of CLAT met with Pope John Paul II at his personal library for more than an hour exchanging messages and talking about Latin American issues of mutual concern."<sup>62</sup>

Certainly a high point in this return of CLAT to close public association with the Catholic Church was a conference on "The Social Teaching of the Church and the World of Labor in Latin America in the 80s." This meeting was held at the CLAT headquarters in Caracas, Venezuela, on the occasion of the visit of Pope John Paul II to that city in January-February 1985. The conference was attended by about 100 people, particularly clergymen from all over Latin America, and leaders of CLAT.

The pope used the occasion to send a special message to CLAT. He said:

I wish now to offer a special salute to some groups who are here. First, to the leaders of the Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores (CLAT), with whom I had the pleasure of meeting in Rome. I know that in these days you are carrying out in the Universidad de los Trabajadores, on your initiative and with the patronage of CELAM [Latin American Episcopal Council], an important meeting on 'The Social Teachings of the Church and the World of Labor in Latin America in the 80s.' There are together numerous bishops and trade union leaders of the whole continent. I consider such meeting a great gift given to the Pope during his stay in Venezuela; because you know what interest I have in that question. I believe I have made this clear, among other occasions, in the encyclical 'Laborem Exercere,' of which you have been students and defenders.

Finally, Pope John Paul said, "I urge you to continue in your task. It is very important for the Church, for the movement of the workers, for Latin America, the perspectives you are considering and putting into effect. And I take this opportunity to tell you that I feel solidarity with the travails of many Latin America workers who see their conditions of life and labor deteriorate, but above all their values and hopes of integral and growing liberation of humanity."<sup>63</sup>

However, this turn back toward professions of belief in Social Catholicism did not mean that CLAT abandoned some other aspects of its ideological position. For instance, in 1987 it published what it called "Política y Estrategia Internacional: Líneas Fundamentales de Orientación." This document set forth the essential points of CLAT's view of Latin America and the problems facing it that incorporated many of the ideas that it had particularly stressed during its more secular period. These included its defense of democracy, its belief in the primacy of the North-South division of the world.<sup>64</sup>

## FINANCES OF CLASC-CLAT

CLASC-CLAT was well financed. Its funds clearly did not come principally from dues payments to the organization from its affiliates. On the contrary, the financing of the various national groups of CLASC came in the early years to a greater or lesser degree from the confederación, which itself received funds to a very considerable degree from outside of Latin America.

Opponents of CLASC talked about the organization being financed by "the German bishops."<sup>65</sup> John Windmuller wrote concerning this, "Although separate Christian unionism has made no headway among German workers, the German Catholic Church has shown considerable interest in social movements in underdeveloped areas, especially in Latin America, and with WCL approval has made funds available to CLASC for organizing and educational programs."<sup>66</sup>

In the early 1960s, the ICCTU established what it called the International Solidarity Fund to help finance its affiliates in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Some of this financial aid went to CLASC, and through it, to its affiliates.<sup>67</sup> In 1968 it was reported that the Solidarity Fund provided the CLASC with contributions from unions in "Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria, Luxemburg, France and other countries."<sup>68</sup>

It is clear also that some of the European affiliates of the World Confederation of Labor contributed directly to CLASC-CLAT on a more or less regular basis. This was particularly clear in the case of the Netherlands, where there existed CLAT Holanda, described as "a human group in this country that supports with solidarity the struggles of the Latin American workers." One aspect of this solidarity was in the form of "important financial campaigns to raise funds to aid the struggles of the Latin American workers."<sup>69</sup>

At least some of the CLASC-CLAT national affiliates also received financial aid from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. This was the adjunct of the West German Christian Democratic Party, set up in accordance with the law of the Federal German Republic providing government funding for each of the three principal parties—Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Free Democrats—for organizations to carry on activities abroad, particularly in the developing world. We know specifically of such help being given to the CEDOC in Ecuador, where in 1975 it was providing most of the financing of that organization.<sup>70</sup> However, we do not have the details about the situation in other Latin American countries.

The resolution of the seventh meeting of the Consejo Latinoamericano de Trabajadores (former Consejo Continental), to which we have already referred, went into some detail regarding the financing of the affiliates of the CLASC. This discussion started by asserting: "The CLASC insists that

each trade union organization must as soon as possible find the way to be self financing. But in practical terms this will come to pass only to the degree that trade union dues are organized."

This document continued:

Until self financing is achieved, all of the national trade union organizations during this phase of development must find extra means of financing outside of the trade union movement. The mobilizing of these resources takes place on a national basis, and principally on an international basis. And to guarantee the most possible freedom of movement and action of Christian trade unionism vis-à-vis the people or organisms which, outside of the trade union movement, aid financially the expansion of consolidation of Christian trade unionism, the CLASC has found convenient the creation of national trade union Foundations, as means of extra and accelerated financing of our national organizations.<sup>71</sup>

We have no information concerning the degree to which any of the CLASC affiliates became self-financing, or concerning the annual budgets of the confederation, and only scattered details about its source or funds. However, it is clear that its activities—maintenance of several trade union education centers, its admitted subsidization of many of its national affiliates, meetings of its congresses and other conferences, and its substantial bureaucracy—required substantial sums.

Upon occasion, CLASC-CLAT was able to provide an affiliate with funds for special organizing purposes. One such incident occurred in Jamaica in 1963, when the Trade Union Council of that country was affiliated with CLASC and ICCTU. There were collective bargaining elections in the sugar industry, and it was reported (admittedly by an unfriendly source) CLASC had rushed 25 full-time organizers to Jamaica for the duration of the campaign to represent the sugar workers. In spite of these efforts, the TUC did not fare very well in those elections.<sup>72</sup>

The statutes of CLAT, as revised in 1977, provided: "The financial resources of the CLAT come a) From the dues of the affiliated organizations; b) From the annual financial campaign; c) From extraordinary dues; d) From financial activities of CLAT; e) From donations and contributions that do not influence the ideology, the principles, or the program of the CLAT."<sup>73</sup>

It would seem to be clear that the last of these sources of financing was the most important one. This was indicated by Emilio Máspero in his report to the Seventh Congress of CLAT. He said, "The CLAT has been developing in various Organizations and countries some efforts at self-financing via Dues, Financial Campaigns, and other activities of these same organizations. So far, the results achieved are very insufficient to cover all of the needs of the Organization."

Máspero then warned that "there are multiplying strange Movements of Agencies and Institutions and groups, both in the United States and

Canada and in some European countries seeking to subordinate the base organizations to certain ideological and strategic positions that do not correspond with the policy of the CLAT." He then added that these outside groups were both conservative and Marxist-Leninist in orientation, and that even intelligence services of both the CIA and the Soviet KGB might be involved.

Finally, Máspero lamented, "It is known that in various National Organizations they have fallen into a state of Chronic indiscipline with regard to external financing, abusing bilateral agreements that will soon create explosive situations that will put in very serious danger all of the National and Supranational Organization."<sup>74</sup>

### **COLLECTIVE BARGAINING OF CLASC-CLAT AFFILIATES**

In its official reports and its publications, CLASC-CLAT gave relatively little attention to the collective bargaining function of its affiliated unions. This perhaps reflected the fact that from the beginning it had sought to differentiate itself particularly from ORIT, which it accused of being "too economic," and concentrating much on the role of collective bargaining. However, as we have noted, CLASC-CLAT did defend the workers' right to strike.

An exception to this downplaying of collective bargaining was the official "Informative Review" of CLASC activities of 1968. In a short entry there, it was noted that CLASC unions have "carried out various collective negotiations and presented lists of demand seeking for the improvement of conditions of life and work. Leaders, militant members and trade union organizations of CLASC participated in more than 257 strikes and conflicts." The report added that "[i]n many countries, these activities had been particularly difficult due to the policy generalized by the International Monetary Fund imposing the freezing of collective contracts and of wages as a method of cleaning up the economy and the monetary system of the member countries."<sup>75</sup>

### **CLASC-CLAT AND THE ICCTU-WCL**

As we have noted, CLASC was originally established at least in part because the ICCTU was seeking after World War II to break out of its isolation in Europe, and to spread into Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As CLASC itself reported, "The CLASC was born from the beginning with the idea of converting itself into the Latin American Regional Organization of the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions."<sup>76</sup>

The relations between the two international labor organizations remained close. However, it became something nearer to a relationship between two independent organizations, than a situation of more or less

complete dependency of the Latin American group upon the world confederation that characterized the situation in 1954 and immediately thereafter.

The president of the ICFTU, Gaston Tessier, attended the founding congress of CLASC in 1954, and was named honorary president of that meeting.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, the secretary-general of the ICCTU, Augusto Vanistendael, was present at the Second Congress of the CLASC, and "[a] European adviser remained in Chile for twelve months, aiding the ASICH, Chilean affiliate and based at the CLASC, as well as the latter."<sup>78</sup> We have already noted the world organization contributed considerable financial aid to CLASC-CLAT.

It became customary for some leading figure of the worldwide organization to participate in the congresses of CLASC-CLAT. Thus, at the Seventh Congress in 1977, Jan Kulakoski, secretary of the World Confederation of Labor (as it was called by that time), was in attendance and delivered a speech in which "he established the continuation of the relation between the recent Congress of the World Central and Congress that was opening in San José, noting the growing consciousness of the European workers of the problems of the Third World, and their solidarity in participating in solving them."<sup>79</sup> Also present were top officials of the WCL regional organizations in Africa and Asia.<sup>80</sup>

However, by that time the relationship between the World Congress of Labor and CLAT had substantially changed. Emilio Máspero, as the principal figure in CLAT, the earliest and most successful of the WCL's regional affiliates, had become vice president of the WCL. His importance and that of his organization within the World Congress of Labor was indicated by the fact that he was a featured speaker at a colloquium on the New International Economic Order and the Workers and Their Organizations organized by the WCL in Manila, the Philippines.<sup>81</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Confederación Latino Americana de Sindicalistas Cristianos-Central Latino Americana de Trabajadores was founded in 1954 as the Latin American regional affiliate of the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions. It consisted at its inception principally of Catholic groups that were working within existing central labor groups in the various countries—with the exception of its affiliates in the British, French, and Dutch Colonial possessions in and around the Caribbean. However, in time, it developed, or otherwise brought into its ranks, its own national central labor groups in most of the Latin American republics and a few English-speaking Caribbean countries.

However, there were few nations in which the CLASC-CLAT affiliate was the dominant organization in the labor movement. It did not have such an organization in the countries with the largest labor movements—Argentina,

Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and Cuba. Only in the Dominican Republic was its affiliate for a while at least the largest trade union organization. Nor did it have the majority group in any of the English-speaking territories, with the exception of Belize, where for some years at least, its group was the largest.

In spite of its humble beginnings, CLASC-CLAT succeeded in becoming the second largest Western Hemisphere international labor group. Nevertheless, although it talked frequently about the need for unity within the Latin American trade union movement, such arguments were usually made in a context that made the argument mean unity within CLASC-CLAT. It seems highly unlikely that the leaders of CLASC-CLAT ever seriously contemplated joining forces with ORIT, which undoubtedly was much larger than its rivals.

CLASC-CLAT carried on a very extensive program of trade union leadership training. It sought to have each national affiliate maintain such an effort, and it had several regional training centers and the so-called University of Workers of Latin America in Caracas, where CLAT had its headquarters.

CLASC-CLAT was very well financed. To a greater or lesser degree it financed its affiliates. It was able to maintain a substantial bureaucracy at its headquarters, had some regional centers as well, was able to run numerous congresses of the organization itself as well as meetings dedicated to particular problems that were attended by people from outside of the CLASC-CLAT and its affiliates. It also had a substantial publication program. The financing of these activities came largely from sources of CLASC-CLAT. It was no more able than other trade union groups in Latin America to pay for its work through dues of the workers belonging to its affiliates.

Over the decades, two people were the principal spokesmen of the organization. In the beginning was José Goldsack, organizer of the founding congress and first president of CLASC. However, by the end of the first decade of CLASC's existence, Emilio Máspero, an Argentine, had emerged as principal executive officer and spokesman for the organization.

Finally, one of the things for which CLASC-CLAT is significant is that it became the most important Catholic-oriented trade union movement anywhere in the world. From its inception, it had a distinctive Christian Social ideology, which it stressed. Although for a decade or more in the 1960s and 1970s it sought to secularize itself, it returned to an emphasis on Catholic Social thinking and close association with the Roman Catholic Church after 1978.

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## CHAPTER 11

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# Subregional Labor Groups

Usually the international trade union organizations—whether national central labor groups or unions of a particular skill or industry—had as their field of jurisdiction all of Latin America and the Caribbean or, in the case of the Panama Federation of Labor, CIT, and ORIT, the whole hemisphere, including the United States and Canada. However, there were also international labor organizations that confined their attention to a more or less well-defined part of Latin America or the Caribbean. These were the subregional organizations.

There were two subregions in particular that gave rise to a series of organizations bringing together, or aspiring to being together, the trade union groups functioning within these areas. These were Central America, and the Caribbean or Indies, that is, the territories in and around the Caribbean that until after World War II were colonies of a European power.

In Central America, the initiative for forming a subregional labor group tended to come after some unions had become members of a broader regional organization. In contrast, in the West Indies, the urge to form a federation of union groups of the area came from within those groups, and the resulting subregional organizations then became affiliated with broader world (and regional) trade union confederations.

### CENTRAL AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

The first case of a subregional labor group of the kind we are discussing was the Central American Federation of Labor (CAFL), established immediately after the First World War on the initiative of the Pan American

Federation of Labor (PAFL). It sought to bring together those union groups that already were affiliated, at least in name, with the PAFL.

Sinclair Snow, the historian of the Pan American Federation of Labor, wrote that

Guatemala played a major part in the formation of the Central American Federation of Labor, which was hoped to be a beginning move toward the political unification of Central America. The first steps toward this organization were taken at the Second Congress of the PAFL in 1919, when the delegates from El Salvador obtained the adoption of a resolution for a Central American Federation of Labor. This resolution embraced in considerable detail the form that the organization was to assume. It was not fully organized until September 1921, when it held its first congress in Guatemala City.

The principal national union groups that participated in the CAFL were apparently the Federación Obrera de Guatemala, the Federación Obrera Occidental Guatemala, and the Unión Obrera Salvadoreña and the Federación Regional de Trabajadores of El Salvador. Honduras's Unión de Obreros participated only in the Second Congress of the PAFL, and there is no indication concerning the degree to which it took part in the CAFL.

At most, the CAFL had a few thousand workers in its ranks, the great majority of whom undoubtedly were artisan craftsmen. Snow mentions 1,600 workers in the Guatemalan unions affiliated with the Pan American Federation of Labor and 2,000 each in those of Honduras and El Salvador.<sup>1</sup>

We have no information on the nature of the activities of the CAFL.

## POST-WORLD WAR II LABOR SUBREGIONAL UNITY EFFORTS

The Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) never made a real effort to establish subregional groupings of its affiliates. Although at its founding convention the CTAL provided for affiliates and Central American-Caribbean representatives, there were no subregional organizations set up for those two large areas, and the special representation for the two parts of the hemisphere was subsequently removed from the CTAL constitution.

However, such was not the case with the CTAL's rival, the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT).

More than a generation after the demise of the CAFL, ORIT undertook an effort to bring together the organized workers of Central America in a subregional labor confederation that could speak for the workers of that part of the hemisphere. It did so against a background that was quite different from that which had existed during the life of the PAFL.

For one thing, the labor movement of the area in the post World War II period was quite different from that of the early decades of the 20th century.

Whereas the labor movement of the earlier period had consisted in Central America of small groups of artisans, a generation later there had come into existence, with varying degrees of strength, unions of railroaders, factory workers, agricultural workers (particularly those employed on banana plantations) and white-collar workers. Organized labor numbered in the tens of thousands of members rather than a few hundred in each country as had been the case in the days of the PAFL.

These different circumstances reflected the fact that as a consequence of the Great Depression and World War II substantial economic development had occurred in these countries. Industrialization had begun to make some progress, particularly in Guatemala and El Salvador, and to a somewhat lesser degree in the other countries of the area. Urbanization had also been greatly stimulated, which further diversified the economies.

Economic development had thus become a major concern in the national politics of the various republics. One way to stimulate development that had been widely accepted in the post World War II period was to join together the economies of the several republics so as to provide a larger market and provide Central America at least a greater degree of bargaining power in the world market.

Indeed, by the time new efforts were made to forge some kind of unity among the labor movements of the area the Central American Common Market had been brought into existence. As we shall see, a major preoccupation of the union leaders of the various countries when they joined their forces was how to make the Common Market serve the interest of the workers of the area as well as those of the entrepreneurs who were chiefly benefiting from it.

However, such economic and social issues were not the only things of concern to the Central American labor leaders as they sought to work out and carry into practice policies to benefit their unions' members. In one way, the Central American republics had not changed since the early decades of the 20th century. With the notable exception of Costa Rica, their governments tended to be dictatorships, interspersed by short periods of more or less democratic rule. The inherent political instability and oppression of this situation made it difficult for the labor movement of the various countries to achieve lasting gains for their members, or even to maintain their existence as organizations. Not infrequently, dictatorial regimes were inclined to regard trade unions as being by definition subversive, an attitude that was often encouraged by employers with whom the unions attempted to deal. At the very least, such governments sought to exercise extensive control over the unions.

Armed conflicts created further difficulties for the labor movements as well as the general civil society in those republics. In the early 1960s, civil war broke out in Guatemala, which to a more or less intensive degree was to continue for more than a quarter of a century. In 1969 there was a short-lived war between Honduras and El Salvador that was quickly halted by



the Organization of American States, but aroused jingoistic sentiments in both countries, which had their impact on organized labor and certainly hampered for some time cooperation between the trade union movements of the two countries.

The role of violence in Central America was at its worst in the 1980s when the Guatemalan civil conflict intensified and similar wars broke out in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The situation was greatly complicated by the direct intervention of the administration of U.S. President Ronald Reagan on the one hand, and Fidel Castro on the other. Even Costa Rica and Honduras, which were not themselves suffering from civil war, became involved to a greater or lesser degree in the conflicts of their neighbors. Understandably, much of the attention of the national labor movements of the Central American countries, and of organizations seeking to develop and maintain collaboration among the organized workers of the area, had to be devoted to the question of bringing these conflicts to an end.

### **CONFEDERACIÓN DE TRABAJADORES CENTROAMERICANOS**

From its inception, ORIT had Central American affiliates. It was logical that geography and similar kinds of problems would tend to encourage the bringing together of those national union groups into an organization of their own within the ORIT structure.

A first move in this direction was taken in 1961, with the establishment of a Coordinating Committee of the Central American ORIT affiliates. In May 1966, that body called a conference at which was established the Confederación de Trabajadores Centroamericanos (CTCA). It was reported that in the early years, "with the help of the ORIT, the AIFLD and the International Trade Secretariats, the CTCA had very positive results."

However, the Central American Confederation faced a major crisis when the war between Honduras and El Salvador took place in mid-1969. In spite of the problems caused by that conflict, the Third Congress of the CTCA was held in San José, Costa Rica, with delegates present from all of the national affiliates, including those from Honduras and El Salvador. According to the ORIT Secretariat, "among other problems, the situation of these two counties were dealt with" at the congress, and "several agreements were arrived at aimed at overcoming the crisis as well as at a better coordination between the CTCA, ORIT and AIFLD." The Secretariat added, "At all times ORIT acted with the caution that the circumstances demanded, avoiding to take a part in the controversy and in the mutual recriminations of our Honduran and Salvadorean affiliates."<sup>2</sup>

There was a further meeting of the CTCA in March 1970 in Cuernavaca, Mexico, on the occasion of the Seventh Congress of ORIT. The agenda of that conference, which was attended by representatives of all of the

affiliates of the CTCA, including the Confederación de Trabajadores de la República de Panamá, consisted of four items: reforms of the statutes of the CTCA, coordination of the CTCA and ORIT, coordination of educational work among the CTCA, the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the International Trade Secretariats, the International Labor Organization, and the Organization of American States; and "the trade union political line of the CTCA," both in the individual countries and in the process of Central American economic integration.

Particular unhappiness was expressed with how the establishment of the Central American Common Market had been proceeding, and a long resolution on the subject was adopted. It argued that as it developed, the economic integration of Central America had not only "fostered a greater and more rapid impoverishment of the Central American peoples but also had intensified the disqualities already existing among the Member States." It stressed that "it is imperative to restructure the policies and mechanisms of the Central American Common Market so that the distribution of its benefits is felt by all the sectors that contribute to create it, and thus liquidate the pernicious tendencies to concentrate these in privileged sectors." It called specifically for "full, effective and sufficient participation of the most representative trade union organizations of the Area and under equal conditions with other interested sectors."<sup>3</sup>

The Ninth Regional Congress of the CTCA was held in San Salvador in June 1975. The report of Secretary-General Claudio Artavia to that congress provided a useful picture of the activities of the confederación.

Artavia first noted the resolution of the Eighth Congress, which had been held in San José, Costa Rica, on "Trade Union Freedom and Labor Legislation," which had "denounced the restrictions that interfere with trade union freedom, in various forms and different methods... with more or less coercion—depending upon the existing regime—but always with the clear tendency of favoring most the minority groups that possess economic power, that is to say Political Power." He commented that the CTCA had widely distributed a pamphlet on this subject but did not indicate any more specific actions to deal with the problem.

The secretary-general then noted another resolution of the previous congress of the CTCA dealing with the Central American Common Market. He claimed that the recommendations of the CTCA had been "accepted by the High Level Commission on the Restructuring of the Central American Common Market, and that this had been "a rousing triumph for the Confederación de Trabajadores Centroamericanos."

Artavia paid special attention to the trade union leadership training and education course that had been run by the CTCA since its last congress. These had included sessions on the problems of port workers, on comparative analysis of collective contracts, and others for labor education instructors and for leaders of teachers' unions. There had also been a special conference on the problems of women trade unionists.

The CTCA secretary-general also reported on his visits to the CTCA affiliates in the various Central American countries to strengthen the feeling of solidarity among them, and to help them resolve some of their problems. Since the last congress, he had visited Honduras and El Salvador twice, Nicaragua and Guatemala on one occasion in each case. He had also twice been to Mexico City to keep the ORIT leadership informed about the CTCA activities and to strengthen liaison with the inter-American organization.

Finally, Artavia reported that he had maintained extensive written contact with "high personages, affiliated confederations, independent federations and unions, and public opinion in general through bulletins, pronouncements, publications and correspondence of various types." He noted that his correspondence had included a letter to the president of Panama and General Torrijos supporting that republic's claims to sovereignty over the canal; to the Panamanian minister of labor protesting the mistreatment of the country's bank workers' union, to the president of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly urging a reform of that country's "archaic" labor code.

The Informative Bulletins that the CTCA had issued from time to time since the previous congress included ones supporting the Panamanian people in the face of the "pretensions" of the Chiriqui Land Company (that country's branch of United Fruit), protesting against the oppressive antilabor policies of the Pinochet government in Chile, lauding the passage by the Costa Rican Assembly of a Law for the Protection of the Consumer, and a variety of other similar issues.<sup>4</sup>

Understandably, the CTCA paid special attention to the Central American Common Market. Each of its congresses passed resolutions on the subject, and in 1975 a number of these were brought together in a pamphlet, which also included a memorandum the CTCA contributed to a symposium on the Reconstruction of the Central American Common Market held in Guatemala in March 1974. It summed up the position of the CTCA on various questions concerning the effort to merge the Central American economies.

The Central American Common Market had experienced considerable disruption as a consequence of the short-lived war between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969. As a result, the Secretaría de Integración Centroamericana drew up a plan to renew the process of integrating the Central American economies. The CTCA's memorandum was presented to a regional symposium held in Guatemala City in March 1974 to consider that body's proposals.

The CTCA plan reiterated the positions the organization had taken since the establishment of the Common Market. It emphasized the need for the integration of "all sectors of society, including labor," and that "[t]his representation must have voice and Vote" in the organs of the Common Market. The labor representation must be from "the most representative" labor group. The plan once again insisted on the need for agrarian reform

as a means of having the rural workers, who made up the majority of the population, participate fully in the benefits of the Common Market.

The CTCA also insisted on the need for assuring that the benefits of the Common Market should not be limited to the employing class. To this end, it urged tax reforms, and insisted on the reinvestment of profits in Central America instead of being sent abroad as was being done by many companies, particularly the foreign-owned ones. Finally, the CTCA document stressed the need for fostering industrialization and a diversification of agricultural production.<sup>5</sup>

## **WEST INDIAN SUBREGIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS**

Until the 1960s, the territories of the Windward and Leeward Islands in the Caribbean Sea, as well as British Honduras in Central America and Surinam and French and British Guiana on the north coast of South America, were colonies of Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands. The labor movements of those countries developed as part of the general movement for political democracy and self-government (culminating in most cases in independence), the first signs of which appeared in the first three decades of the 20th century, bursting into flame in the late 1930s and becoming all but invincible after World War II.

As soon as the labor movement began to appear in various territories, efforts began to bring together in a common organization the trade unions (and related political parties) of the different colonies. The first British Guiana and West Indian Labor Conference was held in Georgetown, British Guiana, in January 1926. It was hosted by the British Guiana Labor Union, headed by Hubert Critchlow, one of the pioneers of trade unionism (and labor political action) in the West Indies. There were representatives present from British Guiana and Trinidad, but also from the Dutch colony of Surinam (or Dutch Guiana). The British Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Labour Party also had a delegate. The meeting adopted a wide range of resolutions dealing with labor issues, including workmen's compensation, national health insurance, non-contributory old age pensions, minimum wages, and child labor. It also dealt with issues that were more those of citizenship than of class, such as prison reform, the nature of juries in the region, and the right to vote for municipal officials.<sup>6</sup>

The broader issues of colonialism were also intensively discussed at the 1926 congress. O. Nigel Bolland noted "[t]he ideas expressed at this conference, that improvements in the lives of working people depended on legislation and self-government as well as on their own trade unions, and that there should be a federal government as well as a federal labor organization."<sup>7</sup>

Hubert Critchlow introduced a resolution to establish a British Guiana and West Indian Labor Federation, which was seconded by the Trinidadian

delegate, Captain A. A. Cipriani, the representative of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association, who also presented the statutes for the proposed federation.<sup>8</sup> However, although this resolution was adopted, it was July 1938 before the Second Guianese and West Indian Labor Conference met in Georgetown, with representatives from Trinidad, British Guiana, and Surinam. This was a preparatory meeting for a somewhat broader conference that met in Trinidad six months later.

At the Trinidad meeting there were not only the usual delegates from British Guiana, Trinidad, and Surinam, but also a delegation from Barbados, headed by Grantley Adams, the head of the newly formed Barbados Workers Union. Among the Trinidad organizations represented was the new Oil Field Workers' Union. This meeting laid particular emphasis on the struggle for self-government, demanding universal suffrage for the election of legislatures to which, in British fashion, the local government should be responsible. It also demanded establishment of a West Indies Federation, and even endorsed a constitution for such a body drawn up by Grantley Adams.<sup>9</sup>

The fourth and last of these British Guiana and West Indian Labor Conferences took place in March 1944 in Georgetown, British Guiana. Like the previous one, it laid particular emphasis on the demand of a self-governing West Indies Federation.<sup>10</sup>

## THE CARIBBEAN LABOR CONGRESS

The first successful effort to establish a united West Indian subregional trade union organization occurred in September 1945, at a congress in Barbados, where the Caribbean Labor Congress (CLC) was formally established. This meeting had been called for at the Georgetown March 1944 Fourth British Guiana and West Indies Labor Conference.

The CLC Founding Congress was the first Caribbean trade union meeting that had representatives of most of the West Indian national labor organizations. There were 26 delegates and five observers at the meeting. They came from Antigua, Barbados, Bermuda, British Guiana, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Trinidad, as well as from the Dutch colony of Surinam.<sup>11</sup>

This Congress met against the background of important events in the world labor movement. The leadership of the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the United States, the British Trades Union Congress, and the Soviet trade union organization had agreed at a meeting in London in spring 1944 to establish a world trade union organization which, hopefully, would come to include virtually the whole world trade union movement. The major group missing from the planning of this new group was the American Federation of Labor, which refused to recognize the Soviet group as a genuine trade union organization.

The preliminary meeting in London had decided to call the founding congress of the new World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) for Paris in October 1945. One purpose of the Barbados conference was to organize a West Indian affiliate for the new WFTU. Since the British Trade Union Congress, with which most of the British West Indian union organizations had more or less close contact, was one of the major patrons of the new world grouping, it was more or less taken for granted that the British West Indian unions would become part of the WFTU.

The Barbados meeting declared in existence of the CLC. It also elected T. A. Marryshow of Grenada as president of the new organization, Hubert Critchlow of British Guiana as first vice president, Grantley Adams of Barbados as second vice president, and Albert Gomes of Trinidad as third vice president. Another Trinidadian, Vivian Henry, was chosen as secretary, with Richard Hart of Jamaica as assistant secretary. Hugh Springer of Barbados was named treasurer. In 1947, Richard Hart became secretary, when Vivian Henry resigned from the post.<sup>12</sup>

The Founding Congress of the Caribbean Labor Congress also voted to join the WFTU. Ken Hill of the Jamaican Trade Union Congress and Hubert Critchlow of the British Guiana Labor Union had both attended the preliminary conference in London early in 1945, and Hill had also attended the founding congress of the WFTU in October of the same year, as an official representative of the CLC. There was virtually no objection to joining the World Federation.<sup>13</sup>

The Founding Congress of the CLC also adopted several other significant resolutions. One of the most important was a "Statement on Economic Development and Federation." It lamented the excessive dependence of the economies of the area on a narrow range of largely agricultural products, and endorsed the idea of "import substitution" industrialization, that is, establishment of manufacturing enterprises to produce products hitherto had been imported. It also endorsed the protection of such industries from foreign competition and, although recognizing the need for some foreign investment to establish such industries, urged that insofar as possible they should be financed domestically.

This statement also emphasized the need for formation of a single political unit, a federation, in the West Indian area, in order to make such a program of economic development feasible. It strongly supported establishment of such a federation as a self-governing new nation.<sup>14</sup>

In the first two or three years there was a strong feeling of unity in the ranks of the CLC. Indeed, it was said that the Second Congress of the CLC, which met in Kingston, Jamaica in October 1947, was "the high point for the CLC." There were 34 delegates to that meeting, representing 27 "trade unions and labor parties from 15 territories." Several union groups that had not been represented in the Founding Congress did have representatives at the Second. These included the General Workers Union of British



Honduras (Belize), and the Man Power Citizens' Association, then the principal workers' organization in British Guiana.

The Jamaica Congress, like its predecessor, devoted much attention to the issue of forming a West Indies Federation. The question was particularly urgent because a meeting was scheduled to be held in Montego Bay, Jamaica, within a few months between representatives of the governments of the British West Indies and Arthur Creech Jones, the secretary of state for the colonies of the British Labour Government. The Congress reiterated the CLC's demand for establishment of a self-governing democratic federation including all of the British territories in and around the Caribbean.<sup>15</sup>

However, by 1948, it began to become clear that there were two distinct tendencies among the leaders—and rank and file—of the organizations belonging to the CLC. In that year, the British Labour Government appointed Barbadian trade union leader Grantley Adams as a member of the British Government delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. There, Adams defended the British Government's decolonization policies and said that there was no reason for the UN to be concerned about them. This speech occasioned protests from some CLC leaders, particularly Secretary Richard Hart.<sup>16</sup>

However, the real split in the organization was provoked by the schism in 1949 within the World Federation of Trade Unions, to which the CLC belonged, and which gave rise to the rival International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Since the British TUC was a major participant in the split in the WFTU, its leaders were anxious to have the CLC and its affiliated union groups also join the ICFTU. Since the great majority of the West Indies trade unionists had no sympathy for the Communists who controlled what remained of the WFTU after the ICFTU split, there was, in the nature of the case, strong support for joining the new international labor confederation, and for joining ORIT, the American regional organization of the ICFTU, when it was established in January 1951.

There were eight West Indian trade union leaders at the Founding Congress of the ICFTU: Grantley Adams of the Barbados Workers Union, Henry Middletown of the General Workers Union of British Honduras, Ashton Chase of the British Guiana Labor Union, Robert Bradshaw of the St. Kitts-Nevis Trades and Labor Union, E. R. Mitchell of the Grenada Workers Union, Christopher Loblack of the Dominica Trade Union, G.F.L. Charles of the St. Lucia Workers' Union, and C. P. Alexander of the Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union of Trinidad. Robert Bradshaw was elected a member of the 19-person Executive Board of the ICFTU as a representative of the West Indies.<sup>17</sup>

A new West Indian organization encompassing the affiliates of the ICFTU and the ORIT was established at a conference in June 1952 in Barbados. This was the Caribbean Area Division of ORIT (CADORIT). Its office in Bridgetown, Barbados, was officially opened on October 20, 1952.



The Founding Conference of the CADORIT set forth the organization's objectives: "(1) to coordinate the activities of the free trade unions of the area, (2) to assist existing trade unions in the area and to promote and help in the establishment of new ones where none exist, (3) to advise the Executive Board of the ICFTU about measures to promote the interests of affiliates in the area, and (4) to collect and distribute data about working and social conditions, social legislation, trade unions and their activities in the area."<sup>18</sup>

The formation of CADORIT left undecided what the official position of the older Caribbean Labor Congress would be insofar as the split in the WFTU was concerned. Grantley Adams as president of the CLC had sought to have the CLC Council declare that body the regional organization of the ICFTU, a move that had been strongly opposed by Richard Hart, the secretary. When Adams could not get a majority in support of his resolution, he had sought to get some of the CLC affiliates to withdraw from the organization.<sup>19</sup>

Grantley Adams had urged Secretary Hart to call a meeting of the CLC Council to decide on the question of what to do about the future of the CLC. Hart had countered with the claim that that decision should be made by a congress of the organization and had urged Adams to call such a meeting, which he refused to do.

Hart had then organized a delegation of leaders of the unions still affiliated with the WFTU to visit Grantley Adams in Barbados with the proposition that a new West Indian organization be established that would include both WFTU and ICFTU affiliates but would not itself be part of either world organization. The delegation had also suggested that representatives of West Indian unions affiliated with the WFTU and the ICFTU be sent to seek the support of the two world organizations for such an arrangement.

The report of the Second Congress of CADORIT told of Adams' reply to this suggestion:

Of course, Brother Adams turned down such proposals as being altogether without sense, to say the least. How these gentlemen could sincerely and honestly expect affiliates to work side by side when the international bodies to which they are affiliated are so far apart, and when the principles that guide them are so diametrically opposed, is more than one can understand. Brother Adams stated quite categorically that he was not prepared to refer any such proposals to the ICFTU as he was positive that they would reject them.<sup>20</sup>

According to his biographer, Grantley Adams had by that time reached the conclusion that "[t]he Caribbean Labour Congress must be dissolved. CADORIT and not the C.L.C. must be the 'fountainhead of Caribbean unity in trade union affairs.'"<sup>21</sup>

In a last vain effort to have the CLC continue, Richard Hart tried to move its Secretariat to London, which failed. However, on July 1, 1956,

the London branch of the CLC, its only remaining organization, officially declared it dissolved."<sup>22</sup>

## CADORIT

The organization that took the place of the Caribbean Labor Congress was the Caribbean Division of the ORIT. This came into existence as the result of a meeting in Trinidad in April 1952 between Francisco Aguirre, the secretary-general of ORIT, and a group of West Indian union leaders: C. P. Alexander of the Trinidad Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, Frank Walcott of the Barbados Workers Union, F. J. Carasco of St. Lucia, and L. E. Eleazer of the bauxite miners' union of Surinam. They decided to call a congress in June in Barbados of all of the West Indian unions belonging to the ICFTU and ORIT.<sup>23</sup>

There were 26 delegates from 17 organizations at the Barbados meeting that established CADORIT. Six of these were in Trinidad, three in Surinam, two in British Guiana, two in St. Lucia and one each in Barbados, Grenada, Dominica, and British Honduras.<sup>24</sup> Serafino Romualdi also attended in his role as secretary of international relations of ORIT.<sup>25</sup> Frank Walcott of the Barbados Workers Union was elected chairman of the new organization, and L. J. Marcano of the Commercial and Industrial Workers Union of Trinidad was chosen as CADORIT secretary.<sup>26</sup>

Following the establishment of CADORIT, Caribbean Labor Congress President Grantley Adams sent a circular letter to the CLC's affiliates suggesting that the CLC split up, according to their affiliate with the WFTU or the ICFTU, and suggesting that the latter should all join CADORIT.<sup>27</sup>

Walcott and Marcano were very active leaders of CADORIT. They visited the affiliated union groups frequently, helped them in strikes, gave practical advice on union management, and looked into requests for financial aid.<sup>28</sup> Under their leadership, CADORIT published a regular newsletter, which was edited by Dr. Eric Williams, who was then a professor in Howard University and an official advisor to CADORIT until he resigned to enter Trinidadian politics early in 1956.<sup>29</sup>

One of the most important early activities of CADORIT was the Caribbean Conference on Sugar and Plantation Workers Unions, sponsored jointly by the ICFTU and CADORIT. It met in Georgetown, British Guiana, in August 1955. Delegates were present representing most of the CADORIT affiliates as well as sugar workers' unions in Haiti, Cuba, and Martinique. In preparation for the meeting, Eric Williams prepared a paper on "Economic Aspects of the Sugar Industry," which was provided to each delegate, together with copies of collective agreements of several of the sugar unions of the area.<sup>30</sup>

Another important early activity of CADORIT was to get financial help from the ICFTU and ORIT for the West Indian unions. The kind of things

for which they sought this aid were sometimes quite fundamental. The report to the Second Conference of CADORIT spelled out what it consisted of: "In some islands the assistance took the form of a typewriter or a duplicating machine, while in others it took the shape of a public address system or a motor car. Whatever might have been the shape it took, the assistance always aimed at filling a need of the particular union in its efforts to organize the workers either generally or in a given industry."<sup>31</sup>

In 1956, following the resignation of Marciano as secretary of CADORIT, that post was assumed by Ken Sterling of the National Workers Union of Jamaica, who had been largely responsible for organizing the bauxite workers on that island. He, too, was a dynamic leader of the division, helping to establish the Bahamas Federation of Labor, bringing about affiliation of the General Workers Union of British Honduras and the oil workers union of Aruba and Curaçao to CADORIT.<sup>32</sup>

The Second Conference of the CADORIT was held in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, on April 6–8, 1955. No significant alterations in the organization were brought about at that time.<sup>33</sup> However, by the time of the Third Conference, which met in Port-of-Spain in April 1958, there was clear unhappiness with the kind of relationship CADORIT had with ORIT, and a determination to change the situation. A quarter of a century later, Joseph Pollydore of the Guyana Trades Union Congress explained what the feeling had been at the Third Conference of CADORIT: "There was disaffection among those unions in their relations with ORIT. The decision stemmed from the view that there was need for trade unions in the English speaking Caribbean to be structured in a manner which portrayed greater evidence of Caribbean nationalism or a more clearly definitive Caribbean identity."<sup>34</sup>

Frank Walcott also explained the thinking of the West Indian unionists at the time of the Third Conference of CADORIT:

CADORIT continued to be the coordinating body of trade unions within the region until the concept of an independent federation for the British West Indies was instituted in 1958....The new dispensation of independence that prevailed, following the establishment of the West Indies Federation...led members of ORIT to institute a trade union organization in keeping with the constitutional change that had taken place in the Caribbean....The establishment of the CCL was also aimed at giving trade unionists and workers the status and power consistent with the trade union movement, which had been on the progressive trail for unity and progress for more than 25 years before the introduction of the West Indies Federation.

He added that after the failure of the Federation of the West Indies, "[t]he trade unions were left as their only solace, with the unity of the organization which has kept them throughout the years."<sup>35</sup>

## THE CARIBBEAN CONGRESS OF LABOR (CCL)

The result of the discussion at the CADORIT Third Conference was a resolution calling for "the early establishment of a Caribbean Congress of Labor." The organization of the event was placed in the hands of Osmond Dyce of Jamaica, who had been working with the Plantation Workers International Federation as an organizer of plantation workers in the Caribbean area. He consulted widely with the unionists in the various territories, and with Sir Vincent Tewson, head of the British Trade Union Congress, and appointed a committee to write a constitution for the new organization.

Finally, a meeting was held in Grenada in September 1960 to establish the Caribbean Congress of Labor. Many years later, J. Burns Bonadie (by then first vice president of the CCL) described what had happened there: "[T]he affiliates of CADORIT performed last rites, and like a phoenix bird out of the ashes of the dead CADORIT rose the new regional organization, the Caribbean Congress of Labor."<sup>36</sup>

Frank Walcott passed from being chairman of CADORIT to president of the Caribbean Congress of Labor. There is no doubt that he was the leading figure in the CCL for its first couple of decades, returning to the presidency in 1966 and 1977. He had a firm hand in presiding over the organization, preventing political controversies in its ranks, and striving to have all of the affiliates pay their share of the costs of the CCL.<sup>37</sup> Osmond Dyce moved from being executive secretary of CADORIT to being secretary-treasurer of the Caribbean Congress of Labor, a post he held for six years.

In spite of the change in the nature and name of the West Indian subregional organizational of ORIT, relations between the two groups remained friendly and cooperative. For instance, the Report of the ORIT Secretariat to its Seventh Congress in March 1970 commented: "October 1966 was marked by the 25th Anniversary of the Barbados Workers Union. The CCL, in honor of this noteworthy occasion, held its Third Congress in Barbados to coincide with the BWU celebrations. Invitations were also extended to the ICFTU Executive Board and the ORIT Executive Committee to meet there during this period. The invitations were gladly accepted and both events were held in Barbados."<sup>38</sup>

The Caribbean Congress of Labor had a wide range of activities. In its first years, it put particular stress on trade union leadership training and organization. The Report of the ORIT Secretariat to that organization's Sixth Congress noted: "In October 1961 the CCL created the office of Assistant Secretary for Education, the duties of which include working closely with the CCL affiliated organizations in developing trade union educational programs, cooperating with all other institutions interested in labor education in the West Indies, and formulating a vigorous labor education policy for the CCL itself."<sup>39</sup>

The CCL had assistance in this program from the British and U.S. labor movements and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, associated with the German Social Democratic Party. The pamphlet celebrating the first 25 years of the CCL proclaimed this educational work "a success story for the CCL."<sup>40</sup>

Related to the education and training program of the CCL was its effort to provide research material for use by its affiliates. It established a Research Department in 1975, which lasted only five years, but was revived in 1983. The CCL 25th Anniversary pamphlet noted: "Research has played an active part in the process of collective bargaining and negotiation in that it permits the unions' officials to justify, intelligently, proposals submitted by them to employers and enables them to back up these proposals with statistical information and comparative studies. Research is also seen as a means of strengthening of solidifying the union movement in the Caribbean area."<sup>41</sup>

Where possible, the CCL sought to aid its affiliates in strikes in which they were involved. One notable case was that of the Bermuda Industrial Union in the mid-1960s, when the CCL was able to raise \$10,000 from the ICFTU to provide legal help for strikers who had been arrested. This walk-out was successful. As the 25th Anniversary pamphlet reported, "Organizational aid to this union was massive expansion in membership during the 1960s, and the establishment of the labour movement on the Bermuda scene."<sup>42</sup>

Another example of CCL intervention in a collective bargaining situation of one of its affiliates was recounted in the Secretariat's Report to the Seventh Congress of ORIT: "During the months of February and March 1966 the CCL took a most active part in negotiations and settling of disputes in St. Vincent. On February 24, in a meeting under the chairmanship of the Commissioner, a conflict involving the St. Vincent Workers Union over work conditions and seniority was settled. Outstanding questions in this conflict were ultimately settled in a later visit by Brother Dyce to St. Vincent in April."<sup>43</sup>

The CCL also sought to help their affiliates to form central labor organizations where none such existed. They were able to do this in the case of St. Vincent, where a Trade Union Council was established in 1959. However, they were less successful in St. Lucia, although their efforts there did result in getting the Vieux Fort General and Dock Workers union to join the Caribbean Congress of Labor.<sup>44</sup>

On several occasions, the CCL was brought in to try to heal splits that occurred in the ranks of one of its affiliates. They were successful in Trinidad, where in 1964 there was a division in that country's Trade Union Congress.<sup>45</sup> The CCL was less successful in Dominica, where the Dominica Trade Union was divided in spite of the CCL's effort to prevent it. The Caribbean Congress of Labor had to be satisfied with accepting the dissident Seamen and Waterfront Workers Union into its ranks in addition to the group from which it had split.<sup>46</sup>

In 1967 a very serious split occurred within the Antigua Trades and Labor Union (ATLU), which until that time had been the island's only trade union group. As a result, the Antigua Workers Union (AWU) was established, and it joined the CCL in the following year. Frank Walcott visited Antigua three times, and he helped to get the government to legally recognize the AWU. Subsequently, the Antigua Labor Party, which was associated with the ATLU, lost power, but when it subsequently returned to office, the CCL intervened to try to prevent the Labor Party government from trying to destroy the AWU.<sup>47</sup>

The CCL was placed in a particularly difficult position after the Grenada revolution of 1979 brought the New Jewel Movement (NJM), of more or less Marxist-Leninist inclinations, to power. One trade unionist who was a New Jewel Movement member, Vincent Noel, was a member of the General Council of the CCL, and it was charged that he sought to "subvert CCL and fashion it in the interest of the revolution." Later, in 1983, after a split in the New Jewel Movement government and the murder of the party's leader, Maurice Bishop, and several trade unionists aligned with him, including Vincent Noel, by order of the leaders of another NJM faction, the CCL condemned these murders and urged the governments of neighboring countries "to determine how best to isolate those then in charge of Grenada," although it also took a strong line against invasion of Grenada."<sup>48</sup>

After the invasion, the Eighth Triennial Congress of the CCL, meeting in Barbados in November 1983, voted to send a mission to Grenada to assess the trade union scene. That mission recommended a major effort to aid trade union officials, and that all unions whose leaders had disappeared for one reason or another should hold new elections, after which a new Trade Union Council should be established.<sup>49</sup>

The CCL sought to make the voice of organized labor heard in governmental and intergovernmental bodies that were founded as the area moved toward independence. It was a strong supporter of the West Indies Federation of 1958–1962, and urged it to move toward a new independent federal state. When that federation failed, the CCL supported the effort to establish at least some economic unity among the West Indian territories. Therefore, it backed the Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA) and its successor the Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM).<sup>50</sup>

As supporters of the move toward greater economic unity of the West Indian nations, the CCL demanded a voice in the organizations set up to bring about such unity. They finally succeeded in getting representation with a voice, but apparently not a vote, in the Standing Committee of CARICOM Labor Ministers. It also was given observer status in the Council of Ministers of CARICOM.

From these positions and in their general activities, the CCL was critical of some of the policies of the CARICOM, "particularly in calls for wage restraint as a policy to be pursued by the regional labor movement."



The CCL expressed support for the Caribbean Basin Initiative initiated by the Reagan administration, which provided certain preference for importation into the United States of products of the Caribbean region, and modest financing for development in the area. It sent a mission to the United States to try to win the support of the AFL-CIO for the initiative.<sup>51</sup>

The financial situation of the CCL was always somewhat precarious. When it was established, the CCL was supposed to be financed by regular contributions from all of its affiliates. However, in practice only the Barbados Workers Union and a few others paid their dues in a regular manner. As a result, the CCL came to depend very extensively upon ORIT, the Canadian Labor Congress, and the American Institute for Free Labor Development to pay for their activities.<sup>52</sup>

The Report of the ORIT Secretariat to that organization's Seventh Congress touched on the CCL's financial problems. It noted: "An extraordinary CCL General Council meeting was called...to discuss the critical financial position which threatened a drastic reduction in CCL activities. Realizing that the very existence of the CCL would be in jeopardy if the situation were prolonged, the affiliates agreed to amore active and effective financial contribution to the CCL." We have no indication as to what degree this agreement was in fact put into practice.<sup>53</sup>

By the late 1970s and 1980s, the CCL faced a situation that it shared with organized labor throughout the hemisphere, but which was made worse by a change in the political life of the countries of the West Indies area. The more generalized problem was the widespread acceptance of free trade and free enterprise as the unchallengeable accepted wisdom insofar as economic matters were concerned. This generated what the CCL called "an adversary approach to the labor movement" by governments.<sup>54</sup>

The situation was made more difficult for the West Indian labor movements by a change in the politics of the area. Since the 1930s most significant political leaders of virtually all of the territories had had close association with the labor movement, being at the same time both trade union officials and political party leaders. But by the late 1970s this had changed. A whole new generation of political leaders had emerged who had little or no association with organized labor. The trade unions had come to be regarded by them as just another pressure group that sought to influence politics and government policy, and most members of the new generation of political leaders had little personal contact with or direct knowledge of the problems with which organized labor dealt.

## SUBGROUPS OF CLASC-CLAT

The Catholic-oriented Latin American trade union organization, the Confederación Latino Americana de Sindicalistas Cristianos-Central Latino Americana de Trabajadores (CLASC-CLAT), had its own subregional groups. One of these was the Consejo de Trabajadores del Cono Sur (CTCS),



made up of the CLASC-CLAT affiliates in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay. It was particularly concerned with the leadership training organization for that region, the Instituto de Capacitación Social del Cono Sur (INCASUR), based in Montevideo. However, it also dealt with wider issues. For instance, at a meeting in Montevideo in March 1986 the leaders of the CTCS adopted a resolution welcoming the democratization process then going on in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Bolivia, but also denouncing the lack of such development in Chile and Paraguay, and "denouncing that in all cases there persist the economic policies that accentuate dependency, limit the sovereignty of our peoples and put the greatest weight of the crisis on the shoulders of the workers."<sup>55</sup>

Another subregional grouping of CLASC-CLAT was the Confederación Centroamericano de Trabajadores (CCT), which brought together the affiliates in Central America. In 1963 it established the Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Sociales (ICAES). The institute's avowed purposes were to "provide technical assistance to the popular organizations, for development and improvement of their training programs. This includes advice on the determination of objectives, elaboration of plans and programs, selection of methods and techniques, preparation of documents and other teaching material, etc." as well as "conduct of processes of profundization and specialization for the leaders and members of those organizations, on a national and Central American basis," and "elaboration, compiling and reproduction of documents of general interest for the organizations of particular usefulness for a particular activity or event."<sup>56</sup>

One such event was a Conference on the Process of Democratization, Development and Integration of Central America that the ICAES organized in March 1986 in Guatemala City. It was reported that this conference was attended by 123 "distinguished leaders of the workers of all the Central American countries and special invitees of other countries of Latin America," which strongly urged support for efforts to bring peace to the Central American nations, most of which, to a greater or lesser degree, were undergoing civil war.<sup>57</sup>

The facilities of the ICAES at its headquarters in San Isidro de Coronado in Costa Rica were described as "four meeting rooms, small rooms for the work of groups, library, some facilities for recreation and the capacity for offering rooms and the feeding of 80 participants."<sup>58</sup>

The Third subregional grouping of CLASC-CLAT was the Consejo de Trabajadores de Caribe (CTC). It was the most heterogeneous of the organizations, since it had within it union groups in the Spanish, English, French, and Dutch-speaking territories in the Caribbean. It also was closely associated with the leadership training organization of CLASC-CLAT, dealing specifically with the Caribbean area, in the Instituto de Formación Social del Caribe. The significance that the CLASC-CLAT leadership attributed to this group, at least for a while, was indicated by the fact that when a meeting of the directors of the CTC was held in Caracas in February

1986, it was attended by both Emilio Máspero, the secretary-general of CLAT and Assistant Secretaries-General Eduardo García and José Merced González.<sup>59</sup>

However, the Caribbean subregional organization appears to have been abandoned. At least, it was not mentioned by Emilio Máspero's successor as CLAT Secretary-General Eduardo García, when he sent me information on the CLAT subregional groupings in 2001.<sup>60</sup>

It is clear that the subgroups of CLASC-CLAT were more directly controlled by the CLASC-CLAT than were those of ORIT by their mother organization. Such autonomy as they had was considerably circumscribed. That this was the case was indicated by an official description of the Central American group, the ICAES. It stated, "Being property of the CLAT, it is the Executive Committee of it that names the principal functionaries, approves and supervises the execution of its work plans and budget."

However, this document added, "However, in addition, for the better coordination and better service to the affiliated organizations of the area, there exists a Directive Council that meets ordinarily once a year and which is composed of one member of the Bureau of the CLAT and three representatives" of each of the Central American affiliates of CLAT.<sup>61</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Latin America and the Caribbean being a very large and diverse region, it was not surprising that, within the larger organizations seeking to cover all of the hemisphere south of the United States, and in at least three cases also including that country and Canada, there should come into existence other union groups covering only a part of America. As we have seen, such organizations are particularly a feature of trade unionism in Central America and in the parts of the Caribbean that were colonies until the 1960s.

The early efforts by the Pan American Federation of Labor to bring together the labor organizations of Central America were only modestly successful. This is largely explained by the weakness of organized labor in those countries, as well as the transport and other difficulties of maintaining close contact among the Central American unionists. Subsequent moves by ORIT to bring together the labor movements of that region a generation later were considerably effective.

In the case of the West Indian colonial territories, efforts to bring unity of their labor movements preceded the affiliation of many of those trade unions with broader international organizations. The Caribbean Labor Congress existed before the establishment of the World Federation of Trade Unions, with which it joined forces. The split in the WFTU brought a crisis in the CLC, and its ultimate replacement by the subregional affiliate of ORIT, CADORIT, after a few years was converted into the Caribbean

Congress of Labor, which proved to be the most active and effective of all of the subregional labor groupings.

The Catholic-oriented CLASC-CLAT also sought to establish subregional organizations. It did have such groupings in southern South America, Central America and the Caribbean areas. However, they were much less autonomous organizations than their counterparts in ORIT-ICFTU, being more directly controlled by their parent organization, CLASC-CLAT. They are particularly closely connected with the union leadership training activities of CLASC-CLAT.

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## CHAPTER 12

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# The International Trade Secretariats

A significant role was played in the international relations of the labor movements of the Latin American and Caribbean countries in the post World War II period by the so-called International Trade Secretariats. These were groups that brought together unions of particular industries or crafts from various countries. They were organizations that had developed before 1939 in conjunction with the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) and after 1949 were more or less closely associated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Although these were predominantly European institutions before the Second World War, they subsequently actively sought to expand their operations into other parts of the world, particularly Latin America.

### EARLY HISTORY OF THE TRADE SECRETARIATS

According to Lewis Lorwin, "the real beginnings of the International Trade Secretariats fell in 1889–90." In those years, the first such organizations were established—17 delegates from 12 European countries and the United States establishing the typographers' secretariat in 1889, and 102 delegates from four European countries forming the International Miners Federation in 1890. By 1900 there were already 17 trade secretariats.<sup>1</sup>

This multiplication of trade secretariats which, according to Lorwin, covered "the entire field of industry," was stimulated "by the growth of trade unions in many countries, by strikes which attracted international attention, and by the congresses of the Second International."<sup>2</sup>

The meetings of the Second (or Socialist) International also contributed to giving rise to another organization, the International Secretariat of Trade Union Centers (shortly before World War I renamed the International Federation of Trade Unions—IFTU), which brought together national central labor bodies rather than workers' organizations of single trades or industries. In 1913 IFTU took "the first step toward the establishment of regular relations with the Trade Secretariats."<sup>3</sup>

Of course, during World War I the still overwhelmingly European international labor movement largely fell apart. However, in July 1919, IFTU was reconstituted at a congress in Amsterdam, and what was nicknamed the Amsterdam International was "the spokesman of over 23 million organized workers in 22 countries."<sup>4</sup>

The recovery of IFTU was strengthened by the rapid reestablishment of the International Trade Secretariats. In less than a year, the prewar Trade Secretariats were reorganized and several new ones started. In the reorganization of some of these Secretariats, the initiative was taken by the organizations themselves, in others "the Amsterdam Bureau supplied the initial impulse."<sup>5</sup>

World War II obviously had a disastrous impact on the international labor movement. In Nazi-occupied Europe it was absolutely impossible for trade unions to exist, let alone function. IFTU was reduced to a small office in the London headquarters of the British TUC.

However, both IFTU and the International Trade Secretariats tried to maintain some activity. IFTU held an International Trade Union Conference in July 1942, and in addition to representatives from surviving national central labor groups, there were delegates present "from the International Secretariats of the textile workers, transport workers, miners, metal workers, building workers, boot and shoe and leather workers, food and drink workers, and commercial, clerical and technical employees. At this time, five Trade Secretariats were in close contact with the I.F.T.U. and ten others, according to their varying circumstances, maintained looser links."<sup>6</sup> We have no information concerning how many and which functioning national affiliates of the International Trade Secretariats (ITS) were still active at that time.

Starting in 1946, the ITS revived. The IFTU was superseded by the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which unlike IFTU contained the trade unions of the Soviet Union and other labor movements under Communist control, both in Eastern Europe and in France and Italy.

There were negotiations between the International Trade Secretariats, which in March 1949 joined together in a Coordinating Committee, with the WFTU. They rejected the WFTU's proposal "to transform them into subordinate trade departments" of the WFTU. Lewis Lorwin observed that "[i]t was their opposition that prevented the WFTU from consolidating itself before it was torn apart by the East-West conflict."<sup>7</sup>



When the split in the WFTU led to the formation of the ICFTU, negotiations began between the International Trade Secretariats and the ICFTU. An agreement for "mutual cooperation" was reached.

According to the ITS-ICFTU agreement, "[t]he ICFTU recognizes the right of the Trade Secretariats to maintain their independence, to have autonomy in their international affairs, and to have full jurisdiction in trade and industrial matters. The Secretariats, in turn, recognize the ICFTU as the representative international organization of labor which formulates and executes general policies."<sup>8</sup>

The ITS and ICFTU also agreed that each should have "consultative" representation in the leading bodies of the other. Thus, "the ITS had consultative delegates in the Emergency Committee, Executive Board and General Council of the ICFTU, and representation as well as in the ICFTU congresses. On the other hand, "the ICFTU may take part in a consultative capacity in the conferences and meetings of the Trade Secretariats and of their Coordinating Committee."<sup>9</sup>

Lewis Lorwin sketched the nature of the activities of the International Trade Secretariats in the post-World War II period. He wrote that they "publish journals, make studies of wage and labor conditions in different countries, and extend aid to striking or unemployed workers. They also carry on campaigns for international labor legislation and for the protection of trade union rights. These activities are financed from dues paid by the affiliated trade unions." The ITS also were active in the International Labor Organization of the United Nations in seeking international agreements to raise labor standards.<sup>10</sup>

Writing in 1953, Lorwin also noted the interest of the ITS in extending their membership and influence beyond their original European base. At that time, the International Transport Workers Federation "is worldwide and maintains branch offices in New York, Latin America and Asia."<sup>11</sup> As we shall see, many of the other ITS subsequently also expanded beyond their original European base, and particularly became concerned with Latin America and the Caribbean.

## EXPANSION OF ITS IN LATIN AMERICAN

Although Lewis Lorwin said that in 1929 the International Trade Secretariats had affiliates in Cuba and Brazil,<sup>12</sup> he does not mention which ones were active in those countries, and it was really not until the 1950s that the ITS made a serious effort to extend into Latin America. One, the PSI, the Public Services International, made up of government employees' organizations, organized the First Conference of Public Service Organizations in the Western Hemisphere in Mexico City in February 1960. It was attended by 119 representatives of unions in Argentina, Brazil, British Guiana, British Honduras, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica,

Mexico, Panama Canal Zone, Peru, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. That conference passed a number of resolutions that called upon governments to provide full freedom for their workers to organize and to strike, recognized the responsibilities of government workers' unions to serve the public, and the need to establish "mechanisms to secure cooperation between organizations of public employees and their respective governments," among other things. It also elected a Permanent Coordinating Committee with representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, the United States, and the West Indies. The inter-American representative of the Public Services International also was on this committee.<sup>13</sup>

One of the largest of the ITS, the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees (FIET), was particularly interested in Latin America. In 1968 it held a regional conference in Caracas which established the Inter-American Regional Organization of FIET. Eleven years later, in 1979, the world congress of FIET also was held in the Venezuelan capital.<sup>14</sup>

The Postal Telegraph and Telephone International (PTTI) was founded before World War I, but it was not until after World War II that it seriously undertook to expand beyond Europe. A regional office of the organization in Latin America and the Caribbean was opened in 1956. By 1981, there were 54 unions from 31 countries in the Caribbean and Latin American area that belonged to the PTTI. The PTTI affiliates in the region had almost 200,000 members.<sup>15</sup>

In 1962, Joaquín Bazán of the U.S. Department of Labor noted that there were seven other International Trade Secretariats (in addition to the Public Services International) with Latin American affiliates: the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Technical Employees; International Transport Workers Federation; Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International; International Federation of Petroleum Workers; International Metalworkers Federation; International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers; and the International Union of Food, Drink and Tobacco Workers. He also noted that there were three Inter-American federations: the Inter-American Mine Workers Federation; the Inter-American Federation of Working Newspapermen's Organizations; and the Inter-American Federation of Entertainment Workers.<sup>16</sup>

The International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) set forth in 1964 the objectives of its work in Latin America. These objectives were largely shared by the other International Trade Secretariats working in the Latin American and Caribbean area.

The IMF statement said:

The fundamental objectives that have been followed in our work are, among others: to make the workers aware of their rights and of the procedures and instrument for the defense of those rights; to prepare new groups of honest and responsible

trade union leaders for the leadership and administration of the workers' organizations; to prepare adequately the worker comrades to carry out the functions of shop stewards who handle grievances; to familiarize the leaders and workers of the new systems of industrial engineering installed by many firms for a greater exploitation of the workers, and with solutions for different problems arising from this; to interest the workers and leaders in the economic and social problems that affect their countries so they can play the role that corresponds to them in searching for national and international solutions for them; and finally to create a solid trade union conscientiousness, militant and democratic, and stimulating the spirit of solidarity among the workers in the different countries of the world.<sup>17</sup>

At least one ITS, the Postal, Telegraph and Telephone Workers International, experimented with establishing a hemispheric organization of one group of its affiliates, the light and power workers. This was undertaken at the request of the Argentine Light and Power Workers Federation, which was at first very enthusiastic about the idea. However, when the Argentine union leaders, who had become the principal officers of the hemispheric group, lost interest in the regional organization, the PTTI decided to give up the idea, and that its American light and power unions would affiliate directly with the PTTI rather than through an intermediate organization.<sup>18</sup>

## ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE SECRETARIATS

The ITS engaged in a variety of different kinds of work in the Latin American and Caribbean countries. One was in helping the organizational activities of its affiliates. For instance, the International Metalworkers Federation particularly helped finance organizing work among the bauxite miners of the Caribbean area.<sup>19</sup> The International Transport Workers Federation also provided help for the organizing activities of some of its Latin American affiliates.<sup>20</sup>

Another activity of the various ITS in Latin America and the Caribbean that had some relationship to organizing was that of publicizing news about the trade union movement in the various countries. For instance, the Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International ran "a series of radio programs, in Spanish, for thirteen weeks, entitled 'Progreso.' The purpose of these programs that were carried in approximately 300 stations, throughout Latin America, is to give information on the activities of the free and democratic trade unions of the Americas. In them there have been interviews with trade union leaders.... Through these programs we hope to keep the workers of Latin America, and in particular the members of the affiliates, informed of the events that affect the life of the working class."<sup>21</sup>

The International Mineworkers Federation published an eight-page pamphlet in Spanish on "Collective Negotiations and the Metallurgical Union," as well as seven other pamphlets in Spanish "on the structure and

activities of some of our most important affiliates in Europe and the United States and about the terms of the collective agreements signed by them." It also published other material on the pensions and unemployment benefits that had been gained by unions belonging to the federation.<sup>22</sup>

Sometimes the International Trade Secretariats aided their member unions in collective bargaining. For instance, this was an important function of the International Transport Workers Federation. Its member unions were faced with extensive technological changes taking place in transport in Latin America: on the railroads, there were automated switching yards, diesel engines, piggy-back cargoes being introduced in the 1970s, and in the shipping field there were containerized cargo ships, as well as huge ships that were not docking anymore, but were sending ashore cargo on barges. Finally, on the airlines, which had the most sophisticated personnel of all the transportation systems, there were also constant technical changes being introduced. Since the Latin American unions frequently were not technically prepared to deal with many of these changes, ITF field representatives frequently helped them with advice, and recruited specialized people to work with the Latin American union leaders in negotiating on these issues.<sup>23</sup>

Another example of an ITS being able to provide help in collective bargaining to its Latin America-Caribbean affiliates was that of the Postal Telegraph and Telephone International aid to Caribbean affiliates that were dealing with the British company, Cable and Wireless, Ltd. The PTTI made it a policy to collect as much information as possible about the collective contracts the firm had signed with unions in the region. The distribution of this information to all of the local unions involved helped the union negotiators to judge what was possible in their own collective bargaining with the employer. However, the hope of the PTTI to have the Caribbean affiliates jointly negotiate with the British company had not been possible by the 1980s, principally because the local unions did not wish to surrender that much sovereignty to a regionally chosen body.<sup>24</sup>

The International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) also gave substantial help to its Latin American and Caribbean affiliates in their bargaining with their employers. In the case of automobile workers, the unions were to a large degree facing the same employers as were the auto unions in the United States and Europe. As a consequence, the IMF established Auto Workers Councils for the unions of workers employed by Ford, General Motors, and others. These councils worked closely with their member unions, providing information and giving help in the negotiation process. The IMF had the ultimate hope of establishing simultaneous bargaining throughout the world of all of the unions of workers laboring for a particular automobile firm, although this aspiration remained unfulfilled.

In the bauxite industry, too, the unions of the various Latin American and Caribbean countries were for the most part negotiating with the same employers as were their U.S. counterparts. The IMF and the United Steel Workers of the United States had helped organize the bauxite workers in

the Caribbean area. As a result, the member unions of the IMF in this industry widely exchanged information, and a pattern developed whereby the Jamaican bauxite workers' union negotiated first with the employers, and then the others followed, using the Jamaican collective contract as a model for their own.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, all too frequently the International Trade Secretariats found it necessary to denounce the mistreatment that members of their Latin American affiliates were receiving from employers and governments of their respective countries. One of the most notable examples of this kind of activity was the intervention of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), in the struggle of Coca Cola workers in Guatemala. In the 1970s and 1980s, under a series of oppressive dictatorial governments and particularly recalcitrant employers, these workers' union faced lockouts, murders of its leaders, exile of its lawyers, and establishment of a company union by management.

The IMF intervened in this situation by launching a worldwide boycott of the Coca Cola Company. For a while after 1980 this and other kinds of pressure on the Coca Cola parent firm in Atlanta, Georgia, seemed to have brought a settlement favorable to the union and its members, but within a few years that settlement fell apart. The workers, in desperation, occupied the local bottling plant, and stayed there for 18 months. The IUF, and the ICFTU, launched a new world boycott of the company, and in 1984, the IUF and the AFL-CIO of the United States sent a joint mission to Guatemala to investigate the Coca Cola situation. The mission provided wide publicity for the plight of the workers, as well as a financial contribution to their struggle. The upshot was that by March 1985 a decent settlement with the Guatemalan Coca Cola bottling firm was finally reached by the workers' union.<sup>26</sup>

In the next decade the same ITS, the IUF, had to mount a publicity campaign concerning the desperate situation faced by its Colombian affiliate, the union of banana workers in Urabá, which had finally won employer recognition after a 33-day strike in 1989. Subsequently, the union was the victim of attack from both elements of the guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), and a right-wing paramilitary group.

The IUF denunciation of the Urabá situation said: "The cycle of violence particularly concentrated in Urabá, where all parties to the conflict—agricultural producers, drug traffickers, and insurgents, troops of the government and paramilitaries—converge in their desire to eradicate democratic trade unionism. In recent years, 20 leaders of SINTRAINAGRO [Agricultural Workers Union] and more than 400 of its members have been assassinated."

The IUF document concluded saying that the IUF "is unconditionally committed to the defense of the democratic labor moment of Colombia against all those who seek to annihilate the hopes of the Colombian people for a society based on peace, justice and democratic solidarity."<sup>27</sup>

The International Transport Workers Federation spoke out strongly against the antilabor activities of the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. The ITF inter-American Representative Joaquín Otero wrote about this: "At the ITF Congress, held from 7 to 15 August in Stockholm, Sweden, a Resolution condemning the military government of Chile was *unanimously* approved.... Moreover, the Resolution called for a boycott of all Chilean transport on September 18 & 19. I should also mention that the boycott was highly successful." Otero noted that as a result of these actions, the ITF was accused in a pro-government Chilean magazine of having "heavy Marxist infiltration," and was attacked in Chilean newspapers as being "part of a worldwide communist plot against the Junta."<sup>28</sup>

### ITS LEADERSHIP TRAINING EFFORTS

The most widespread activity of the International Trade Secretariats in Latin America and the Caribbean was in training leadership cadres for their affiliates. Almost all of the ITS working in the region carried on such programs. A few examples will indicate the nature of the ITS educational and training operations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) reported on their educational activities in the area between 1963–1964. They started with a meeting in Santos, Brazil, with 60 participants from 17 countries "who studied problems of the specific metallurgical sectors such as iron and steel, automobiles, and electrical materials." This was followed by a "course of 10 weeks for Formation of Worker Educators in the Labor Relations Institute of the University of Puerto Rico, under the patronage of the IMF and the University of Cornell, attended by 10 comrades of 7 countries."

In addition to these introductory programs, the federation organized 14 seminars in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, and Trinidad, which met fulltime and in which 439 metalworkers participated. In addition, in Colombia and Peru the federation had night classes of a month's duration in which 80 workers participated.

The International Transport Workers Federation did not conduct basic union leadership training programs in Latin America and the Caribbean, feeling that that kind of material was being adequately covered by the American Institute for Free Labor Development. They concentrated, rather, on advanced technical training and technical assistance.<sup>29</sup>

The FIET, on the other hand, did carry out basic trade union leadership education work, but also did some kinds of specialized training, particularly trying to keep their affiliates abreast of technological changes going on in their different kinds of work. It also paid special attention to particular groups of workers, as for instance, a conference on the problems of women workers held in Buenos Aires in 1975.<sup>30</sup>

The International Federation of Petroleum and Chemical Workers (IFPW) began its Latin American and Caribbean educational work in 1960



by cooperating with ORIT in a seminar held in Petrópolis, Brazil. In subsequent years, it ran one-week labor seminars in Trinidad, Curaçao, and Aruba, a 10-week course in teacher training for 12 union leaders from various countries in Puerto Rico, run with the collaboration of Cornell University. The federation reported that the students who participated in that program became involved in expanding leadership training within their own unions upon returning home.<sup>31</sup>

Work among the teachers' unions in Latin America was originally handled through the PTTI, through a contract between that ITS and the International Federation of Free Teachers Unions (IFFTU), because the IFFTU did not want to get directly involved in Latin America, nor did the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) under the leadership of David Selden. But when Al Shanker became head of the AFT, he wanted to have the IFFTU get directly involved in Latin America. So the AFT entered into a subcontract with the American Institute for Free Labor Development, which the AFT administered through the IFFTU.

Most IFFTU work in Latin America concentrated on getting new affiliates to the IFFTU (the number rising from 4 to 14 in the Western Hemisphere), and organizing seminars in various parts of the hemisphere, stressing teachers' collective bargaining.<sup>32</sup>

## ITS AND AIFLD

One aspect of the activities of the International Trade Secretariats in Latin America and the Caribbean that aroused considerable discussion and controversy was their collaboration in many instances with the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), an organization run by the AFL-CIO, but largely financed by the U.S. government. The connection was used by those people who felt so inclined to try to discredit the ITS as tools of the U.S. government, and particularly of the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>33</sup>

The International Transport Workers Federation was one of the International Trade Secretariats that worked closely with the AIFLD. The relations of the federation with the AIFLD were through a contract that one of its U.S. affiliates, the Brotherhood of Railroad and Airline Clerks (BRAC) had with the AIFLD. The BRAC subcontracted the funds it received to the ITF. In 1975 this subcontract provided \$113,750. Of this, \$55,000 was used by the federation for what it called International Programs—such as a study of economic and social changes in Latin America, a women's conference, a conference on the techniques of labor education, a research and statistical study of Latin America transport workers, as well as for financing a regional conference of the International Federation.

Some \$22,500 was used for what were called National Programs, that is, ones within a single country. In 1975 the countries where such funds were spent were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Central America (as a group),



Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The rest of the funds were used to maintain offices of the federation in Peru and Mexico.

However, by no means all of the International Transport Workers Federation's funds for operations in Latin America came from the AIFLD and BRAC. Overall, in 1975 the federation had a budget of \$300,000 for its operations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Of this total, \$100,000 came from the ITF headquarters in London, some came from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the organization of the West German Democratic Party that was appropriated by the government of the German Federal Republic for that party's work abroad. Among the foundation's disbursements to the ITF were expenditures for a seminar for Latin America transport workers held by the foundation in Frankfurt, and subsequent payment for those Latin American unionists to attend afterward an International Congress of the ITF in Stockholm.<sup>34</sup>

The FIET had an arrangement with the AIFLD similar to that of the Transport Workers. One of its affiliates, the Retail Clerks International Association, had a contract with AIFLD, and in turn signed a subcontract with the FIET. During the mid-1970s the amount involved varied from \$160,000 to \$180,000 a year. Among the FIET activities thus financed was a program for basic trade union leadership training, as well as work with particular affiliates such as the bank workers, helping their unions to adapt to the widespread adoption of computer operations by Latin American banks. The FIET also held in 1975 a conference in Buenos Aires, in collaboration with its Argentine affiliates, on the particular problems of women workers.<sup>35</sup>

We have no other firsthand information about how many other International Trade Secretariats financed more or less of their Latin American and Caribbean activities through funds from the AIFLD. However, Fred Hirsch and Richard Fletcher mention the International Federation of Petroleum and Chemical Workers, the Postal, Telephone and Telegraph International, and the International Federation of Teachers as having similar arrangements with their U.S. affiliates to get funds from those sources.<sup>36</sup>

There were some ITS that did not work with the AIFLD. One was the IMF. It explained its refusal, saying: "For the financing of all its seminars and other educational work it has used exclusively funds coming from the dues paid by the metallurgical workers to the IMF, since this International believes that education, like any other trade union activity, should not use funds coming from governments, firms, political parties or religious groups if it wishes to firmly maintain its autonomy and the independence of the free and democratic labor movement."<sup>37</sup>

## THE PURELY AMERICAN ITS

In addition to the supposedly worldwide ITS, there also developed a few Trade Secretariats covering only the Western Hemisphere. Two of these

were the Inter-American Federation of Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Unions and the Inter-American Federation of Musicians.<sup>38</sup>

The Inter American Federation of Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Unions was formally established on the initiative of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), which had made an exploratory trip to Latin America to sound out the interest among Latin American unions in those fields in forming such an organization. It began to function effectively in 1967.

Although the federation began with only a handful of organizations affiliated, it claimed by 1975 to have member unions from all of the Latin American countries except Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica. It also had four U.S. organizations: the United Textile Workers, Textile Workers Union, the ILG, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. The Inter American Federation was headed for a number of years by a Colombian unionist, Carlos Bedoya. The functions of this inter-American group were similar to those of the worldwide International Trade Secretariats. It sought to help with organizing activities, leadership training, and technical assistance to its affiliates.

One example of the federation's aid to an affiliate for organizing took place in Peru in the early 1970s. At that time both the Communist faction in the national labor movement and the reformist military government then in power were seeking to undermine the Federation of Textile Workers, affiliated with the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú, which was affiliated with ORIT and the ICFTU. The inter-American federation sent in a number of activists who contributed substantially to help in convincing the textile workers not to abandon the federation with which they had long been associated.

Leadership training was also an important aspect of the textile Inter American Federation's activities. It centered particularly on helping to develop the collective bargain skills of union leaders.

In 1975, the secretary-general of the Inter-American Federation of Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Unions maintained that all of the affiliated unions paid dues, varying from \$1 for a union with 200 members to \$4—5,000 for the four affiliates in the United States. The Inter American Federation also had a subcontract with the Textile Workers Union of the United States, which turned over to it some \$45,000 a year received from the AIFLD. These funds were to maintain a headquarters in Mexico City and three assistant secretaries in Argentina, Colombia, and Central America.<sup>39</sup>

## **OTHER SPECIALIZED INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

In addition to the International Trade Secretariats that were associated with the ICFTU, there were somewhat similar groups organized by the World Federation of Trade Unions and the ICCTU. However, they differed substantially from the ITS that we have been discussing.

With the split between the ITS and the WFTU, and the subsequent establishment of the ICFTU, with which they became aligned, the WFTU established its own subdivisions, organizations of unions of workers in a particular trade or industry. However, unlike the ITS, those were not autonomous federations, but rather were subordinate units of the WFTU. We have no information indicating that they carried out the kind of organizational and training activities that were undertaken by the ITS associated with the ICFTU.

Similarly, the Catholic-oriented labor confederation established in America, the Confederación Latino Americana de Sindicalistas Cristianos (and subsequently Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores) set up subsidiary groups similar to those organized by the WFTU. They apparently did not have the kind of autonomy from CLASC-CLAT that the ITS had from the ICFTU and ORIT, and carried out their activities as subordinate parts of CLASC-CLAT.

There have also existed International Trade Secretariats that were independent of any of the three worldwide labor confederations (ICFTU, WFTU, and WCL) and had member unions from both sides of the Iron Curtain. There were at least a few Latin American affiliates of these.

The International Federation of Actors (FIA) was one of these organizations. It was established in June 1952. As of June 1979, the actors' organizations in Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela belonged to the FIA.<sup>40</sup>

Another such ITS was the International Federation of Musicians, established in August 1948. As of June 1982, the Latin American union groups affiliated with this federation were those in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the International Federation of Unions of Audio-Visual Workers (FISTAV) was established in 1974. Representatives of Latin American unions at the FISTAV's Third Congress in November 1992 were a delegate from the External Committee of the Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile, and an observer from the Colombian Association of Television Workers.<sup>42</sup>

We have no information concerning what particular activities these organizations had in the Latin American area.

## CONCLUSION

In the post World War II period, the International Trade Secretariats, organizations of unions of workers of particular trades or industries, played a significant role in organized labor in Latin America and the Caribbean. At one time or another, unions in virtually all of the Latin American countries and several of those in the Caribbean were affiliated with these. Their representatives participated in the world conferences of their respective ITS and they received help of various kinds from the Trade Secretariats with which they were affiliated.

The activities of the ITS in the Western Hemisphere varied a good deal from one ITS to another. These included help in organizing, provision of information, and sometimes actual consultation to help their affiliates in collective bargaining. They also included distributing information about mistreatment of affiliates by employers and governments in the area, and seeking to bring international pressure to bear on behalf of those affiliates. However, the most widespread activity of the ITS was helping their affiliates to train leadership on all levels.

The International Labor Secretariats' activities in the region were financed from a variety of sources. In some cases, the headquarters of the Secretariats directly paid for this work. In others, they were financed by contributions from Western Hemisphere affiliates, particularly the U.S. unions involved. In a number of instances, the ITS work in the Western Hemisphere was paid for to a greater or lesser degree by the U.S. government financed, but AFL-CIO controlled, American Institute for Free Labor Development, channeled through one or another U.S. union that subcontracted funds to a particular ITS. In a few cases, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, controlled by the Social Democratic Party of West Germany, and financed by the West German government, worked in Latin America with some of the ITS.

## NOTES

1. Lewis L. Lorwin, *Labor and Internationalism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), pp. 97-98.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

6. John Price, *The International Labor Movement* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 63.

7. Lorwin, *The International Labor Movement: History, Policies, Outlook* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), p. 310.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 310-311.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

13. See "Report of the Proceedings of the First Conference of Public Service Organizations of the Western Hemisphere held in Mexico, D.F., February 8 through 12, 1960" (mimeographed).

14. Richard L. Rowan, Kenneth J. Pitterle, and Philip A. Miscimarra, *Multinational Union Organizations in the White-Collar, Service and Communications Industries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983), pp. 1-41.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-86.

16. Joaquín Bazán, "Fact Sheet of Pertinent Information Re: Latin American Labor Organizations and Their International and Regional Affiliates" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 1962) (mimeographed), pp. 1-2.

17. Fernando Melgosa, "Breve Informe Sobre las Actividades Educativas de la FITIM," Federación Internacional de Trabajadores de las Industrias Metalúrgicas, México, January 1964 (mimeographed).

18. Mr. Ryan (assistant Latin American director, Postal, Telegraph and Telephone Workers International), interview with the author in Washington, DC, June 24, 1975.

19. Fernando Melgosa (Latin American representative of International Metalworkers Federation), interview with the author in Mexico City, July 10, 1975.

20. Joaquín Otero (former Inter American representative of International Transport Workers Federation, vice president, Brotherhood of Railroad and Airline Clerks), interview with the author in Washington, DC, June 25, 1975.

21. "Informe de la Internacional de Correos, Telégrafos y Teléfonos—Actividades Educativas," Primera Conferencia Interamericana de Directores de Educación Sindical (Oficina Interamericana, Enero 13–17, 1964) (mimeographed), p. 4.

22. Melgosa, "Breve Informe Sobre las Actividades Educativas de la FITIM."

23. Otero, interview.

24. Rowan, Pitterle, *Miscimarra, Multinational Union Organizations*, pp. 67–69.

25. Dean Clowes (inter-American representative of International Metalworkers Federation), interview with the author in Washington, DC, June 30, 1975.

26. For details on the Coca Cola case, see Deborah Levenson-Estrada: *Trade Unionists Against Terror: Guatemala City 1954–1985* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); and Hank Frundt and Norma Chinchilla, "Guatemala," in *Latin American Labor Organizations*, ed. Gerald Michael Greenfield and Sheldon L. Maram, 395–431 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987).

27. *Punto de Vista*, mimeographed bulletin of International Union of Food and Allied Workers Association, Geneva, Switzerland, February 3, 1998.

28. Letter from Joaquín Otero (international vice president, Brotherhood of Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks) to Stephen E. Barton, October 1, 1974.

29. Otero, interview.

30. Gerard O'Keefe (head of International Department of Retail Clerks International Association), interview with the author in Washington, DC, June 25, 1975.

31. "Report of the International Federation of Petroleum and Chemical Workers—IFPCW—Labor Educational Programs of IFPCW," First Inter-American Conference of Directors of Labor Education, January 13–17, 1964 (mimeographed).

32. Denise Thiery (inter-American representative of American Federation of Teachers), interview with the author in Washington, DC, June 25, 1975.

33. See Fred Hirsch and Richard Fletcher, *CIA and the Labour Movement* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 1977).

34. Otero, interview.

35. O'Keefe, interview.

36. Hirsch and Fletcher, *CIA and the Labour Movement*, p. 21.

37. Melgosa, "Breve Informe Sobre las Actividades Educativas de la FITIM."

38. Hirsch and Fletcher, *CIA and the Labour Movement*, p. 21.

39. Carlos Bedoya (secretary-general, Federación Interamericana de Trabajadores de la Industria Textil, Vestuario y Cuero), interview with the author in Mexico City, July 8, 1975.

40. See Rowan et al., *Multinational Union Organizations*, pp. 357–359.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 381 et. seq.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 435–461.

## CHAPTER 13

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# The American Institute for Free Labor Development

The American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) differed from all of the other organizations that we have been discussing. It was established as an institution that was almost completely run by the AFL-CIO and was largely financed by the U.S. government. However, since it operated in virtually all of the Latin American and Caribbean countries, had on its Board of Trustees trade union officials from both the United States and Latin America, and collaborated closely with some of the International Trade Secretariats as well as with union organizations in various Latin American and Caribbean countries, it played a significant role in the hemispheric labor movement from the 1960s on.

### BACKGROUND OF ESTABLISHMENT OF AIFLD

One of the major reasons for establishment of AIFLD was the unhappiness of several U.S. and Latin American labor leaders who were concerned with attempts by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to penetrate the inter-American labor movement. This fact was attested to by Ben Stephansky, who for a number of years was U.S. Labor attaché in Mexico, and subsequently was labor adviser to the assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs at the beginning of the Kennedy administration and then U.S. ambassador to Bolivia. He participated in the discussions leading up to the launching of AIFLD.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of a hemispheric leadership training center for the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions- Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ICFTU-ORIT) segment of the labor movement

in Latin America was by no means a new one. For some years, the ORIT had carried on such an effort in Cuernavaca, Mexico and, in collaboration with the University of Puerto Rico, in Rio de Piedras, Puerto Rico. However, the financial resources of ORIT considerably limited the possibility of carrying out such a program on an enlarged basis.

The initiator of what came to be AIFLD was Joseph Beirne, president of the Communications Workers of America. After taking a trip to South America in 1957, he invited 16 officials of unions of communications workers in several countries to come to training courses at the Communications Workers Educational Center at Front Royal, Virginia. After three months at Front Royal, upon their return home these Latin American unionists were subsidized for nine months by the Postal, Telephone and Telegraph International, the International Trade Secretariat to which Beirne's union was affiliated and of which he was an officer.

This experience stimulated Beirne to attempt to launch a broader leadership training program of Latin American trade union leaders. In 1960 he won the approval of the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO for a \$20,000 appropriation "to be used as a sort of seed money to study the feasibility of launching a labor leadership training program that would benefit all the branches of the labor movement, particularly in the underdeveloped areas of Latin America."

Arrangements were made with John McCullum of the Union Research and Education Project Center at the University of Chicago to undertake this study. He worked more or less closely with Serafino Romualdi, inter-American representative of the AFL-CIO, and an advisory committee from the AFL-CIO based in Washington, DC.<sup>2</sup> Among those most active in this advisory committee, aside from Beirne and Romualdi, were William Doherty, Sr., president of the Postal Delivery Workers Union (and subsequently first U.S. ambassador to Jamaica, appointed by President Kennedy), and his son, William Doherty, Jr.

According to Ben Stephansky, the original idea discussed by McCullum and the advisory committee was for the U.S. government to appropriate directly to the AFL-CIO funds for establishing and maintain a labor training program for Latin American unionists. However, Stephansky, as labor adviser to the assistant secretary of state, strongly opposed this idea. It was finally decided to establish a separate organization, the American Institute for Free Labor Development, to receive the financing and carry on the project.<sup>3</sup>

The decision of the advisory committee to set up AIFLD was taken in August 1961, and the Institute was incorporated in the state of Delaware two months later. In January 1962, it was granted tax-exempt status by the Bureau of Internal Revenue, apparently with the hope that this would attract substantial contributions from foundations, something that did not in fact take place.<sup>4</sup>



Once AIFLD was formally brought into existence, there was some trouble in finding someone to head the organization, since Professor McCullum, who was first offered the post, decided that he did not want that position. Several other academics in the labor-management field also rejected the post.

Finally, Serafino Romualdi was offered the leadership of the new Institute, on the suggestion (according to him) of George Weaver, whom President Kennedy had just appointed assistant secretary of labor for International Labor Affairs. Romualdi accepted the job, although remaining "for all administrative purposes a member of the AFL-CIO International Department staff."<sup>5</sup>

According to Ben Stephansky, Romualdi had at first had serious reservations about the new organization, fearing that it would cut into the leadership training work of ORIT (as in fact it ultimately did), but when he decided to accept the post as head of AIFLD, he became its most enthusiastic supporter.<sup>6</sup>

## FINANCING OF AIFLD

One of the favorite allegations of people who sought to bring an end to AIFLD was that it was associated with the CIA. However, the implication that it was financed by that agency was fallacious. Early in the existence of the institute, Serafino Romualdi explained how it was financed at the beginning, and the subsequent pattern that continued throughout the history of AIFLD.

Speaking of the launching of the Institute, Romualdi wrote: "We were finally able to do that, thanks to help from Secretary of Labor Arthur J. Goldberg, who obtained for us an advance of \$100,000 from the President's Emergency Fund. Afterwards, the Agency for International Development included our organization in its regular annual appropriations to the extent that at present it provides by far the major share of AIFLD's financial requirements." He added that "the first \$100,000 Secretary Goldberg delivered to me in person."<sup>7</sup>

AIFLD continued to be largely financed from the annual appropriations for the Agency of International Development. Its contribution constituted more or less 90 percent of the total income of AIFLD.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF AIFLD

AIFLD was established in what might be called a tripartite basis, that is, with its titular leadership including people from the U.S. and Latin American labor movements, from U.S. enterprises doing business in Latin America, and people from the academic community. It was also supposed to be tripartite in another sense, getting its funding from the U.S. labor

movement, U.S. employers with more or less pro-organized labor policies in their Latin American subsidiaries, and the U.S. government. As we shall see, in practice, the AIFLD became bilateral rather than trilateral, since in terms of management, it was largely in the hands of representatives of the AFL-CIO, and in financing, it came to depend principally on the U.S. government.

From its inception, AIFLD's executive director was Serafino Romualdi.<sup>8</sup> When he retired from that post in September 1965, he was succeeded by William Doherty Jr., who remained in that post (renamed administrator) for more than three decades. Doherty had worked "for many years" with Romualdi in the AFL-CIO Inter American Representative's office. He had also been regional director of the Postal, Telephone and Telegraph Workers International in Brazil and Mexico, as well as working for some time in the headquarters of the ICFTU in Brussels.<sup>9</sup>

The president of the AFL-CIO, George Meany, was president of AIFLD, and J. Peter Grace, head of the Grace firm, which had many investments in Latin America, was chairman of the board. From the beginning, Joseph Beirne was secretary-treasurer.

The great majority of the other members of the Board Trustees of AIFLD were trade union leaders from the United States and Latin America. More or less typical were members in 1967, as listed in Romualdi's autobiography. The U.S. unionists were officers of the United Steelworkers, International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks, the International Union of Electrical, Radio, Machine Workers, and the Retail Clerks International Association. Also members were William Doherty Jr., the secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, Romualdi's successor as AFL-CIO Inter American representative, Andrew McLellan, Jay Lovestone, director of the AFL-CIO International Affairs, and Ernest Lee, assistant director of that same AFL-CIO department.

The Latin American labor leaders of the AIFLD Board of Trustees in 1967 were Gale Varela, president of the Tela Railroad Company (banana workers) Union in Honduras, José González Navarro, president of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela, Arturo Jáuregui, secretary-general of ORIT, and Wenceslao Moreno, general secretary of the Maritime Workers Confederation of Chile.

Finally, the businessmen on the Board were Charles Brinkerhoff of the Anaconda Copper Company, William Hickey of the United Corporation, Robert C. Hill of Merck and Co., Juan Trippe of Pan American Airways, and Henry Woodbridge of True Temper Corporation.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning, the activity of the institute largely centered on its modest headquarters in Washington, DC, in the building controlled by the Communications Workers of America. However, it was soon found necessary to provide separate quarters for the classes organized by the

institute; and later the training courses held in the Washington area were shifted to what had been the Communications Workers' training center in Front Royal, Virginia.

In the beginning, too, those working for the institute were almost completely concentrated in the Washington area, since that was where educational activities were centered. However, it was soon decided to establish offices in the countries in which the educational and other activities were located. In most countries, a country program director, usually an U.S. trade unionist, was in charge.

## IDEOLOGY OF AIFLD

AIFLD set forth its ideology in a "Declaration of Objectives." Perhaps the core of this statement was the assertion that

[t]he American Institute for Free Labor Development asserts the right of the workers, both rural and urban, to associate freely in trade unions, to promote, protect and exercise their legitimate economic and social interests. It is recognized that the security of all of the rights of the workers depends upon the realization of this right of association to bargain collectively over wages, hours and conditions of employment to strike. Further, it is necessary that there be juridical recognition of trade unions and collective labor contracts and arguments which extend to protect all workers in an enterprise and which affect all the areas of a widening sphere of application, since this is essential to these rights.

AIFLD clearly did not embrace the idea of class war. The Declaration of Objectives stated that "it is necessary for the nations of Latin America to establish effective systems of labor management relations and industrial jurisprudence and the means for consultation and cooperation among government authorities, employers and trade unions."

However, AIFLD did present itself as an organ of social reform in Latin America. Its statement said:

In the developing nation which requires an active element in its society which promotes the notions of progress, reform and social change, trade unions provide this element most effectively because of the goals and the homogeneity of its membership. The trade union can be most effective when the forces of change are few and they are confronted with well entrenched institutions such as land tenure, unjust tax structures, obsolete educational systems, and elite systems, because it is fundamentally oriented toward progress and development.

However, AIFLD saw the labor movement as fostering change without violent revolution. The Declaration of Objectives argued:

In the developing nation, the free trade union can serve the worker by representing him and striving for his economic, social and political rights. The worker, as

a member of the union, is assured of representation and participation in the basic decisions of his society. Given the knowledge, the worker need not resort to the more radical means of violence and revolt, because he has a means of democratic expression through his trade union which leads ultimately to political and social stability. It is for this reason that the trade union contributes essentially to the climate required for the progress of true development.<sup>11</sup>

## LABOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION

AIFLD was established as an organization to train and educate labor leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean. Only after it was well established did it also add a Social Projects Division, which had a substantially different orientation.

The education effort of AIFLD began with a program, first located in Washington, DC and then transferred to Front Royal, Virginia, designed for top ranking Latin American labor union officials. During the first 13 years of its operation, 1,803 unionists from Latin America and the Caribbean participated in these courses.<sup>12</sup>

However, the education and training program was quickly expanded to involve training facilities in the various countries in which AIFLD was active. Facilities were established in the individual nations to provide training at various levels. The program in the Washington, DC area became the advanced course of the AIFLD system. By 1975, some 257,928 union leaders had been students at "residential centers and regional seminars in Latin America and the Caribbean."

From time to time special programs were mounted for particular groups of labor leaders. For instance, "25 trade unionists from the Bermuda Industrial Union attended a special two-week course on collective bargaining and contract administration at AIFLD's Front Royal Institute as the culmination of the BIU's 'Education Year'."<sup>13</sup>

Supplementary programs were developed to provide specialized training and sources of information that would aid the trade union leaders in collective bargaining. Thus, beginning in 1968, AIFLD organized a course in labor economics for Latin American and Caribbean economists who worked with the unions in those countries. This course was first run in Loyola University in New Orleans, then in Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and finally in Mount Vernon College, also in Washington.<sup>14</sup>

After some experience with the labor economics courses, AIFLD adopted the policy of having all those attending a particular course come from a particular area. Thus, in 1974, all came from the Caribbean, and in the following year all were from the Central American countries. According to one of the professors involved in the program, having students all from the same area meant that there were less disparities among them, and they had more experience in common, and it was easier for the professors to use examples from the particular region from which the students came.<sup>15</sup>

These economics courses, which lasted seven months, were by no means confined only to lectures. A lot of emphasis was put on research, and the students were usually given some intern training in a labor research organization or a U.S. union research operation. Specific courses included micro and macro economics, the role of labor in the countries involved, and statistics, among other subjects.

The director of the 1975 AIFLD labor economics course concluded that the program was serving its purpose—to train people who could help unions in collective bargaining. She found that of the 29 Central Americans who had gone through the course before 1975, 24 were in fact still engaged in advising and helping the unions with which they were associated.<sup>16</sup>

In 1974, AIFLD set up two economics research centers, in San José, Costa Rica, and Bridgetown, Barbados. According to AIFLD, these centers were founded to “do extensive research in statistics, productivity, manpower development, job evaluation, comparative labor law and other areas that will assist the unions in Central America and the Caribbean in meaningful collective bargaining aimed at assuring stability of collective contracts.”<sup>17</sup>

One of the largest AIFLD education and training programs was in Brazil. Although serious questions were raised about that program during the 1964–1985 military dictatorship, its structure was to a greater or lesser degree like AIFLD educational efforts in other Latin American and Caribbean countries.

At the head of the educational-training work of AIFLD in Brazil was the Instituto Cultural do Trabalho, located in São Paulo. The Instituto ran four courses a year in its headquarters, each course lasting eight weeks, and having about 30 to 35 people in each one.

In addition to these courses in the city of São Paulo, the ICT also conducted a number of lower-level courses in cities and towns all over the country. These courses usually dealt with materials requested by the unions whose members attended them. Those people attending the courses in São Paulo were almost always graduates of these lower-level ones.

The São Paulo courses dealt with a variety of subjects. These included Brazilian labor legislation, social security, public speaking, the labor court system, the history of the Brazilian and international labor movements, and collective bargaining. This last subject was taught principally by having the students break up into teams and negotiating a contract. At least one afternoon was devoted to the discussion of the differences among democracy, dictatorship and Communism.<sup>18</sup>

In the Caribbean area, AIFLD helped to establish in Georgetown, Guyana, the Critchlow Labor College. In this, it collaborated with the local Trade Union Congress, which had a majority on its Board of Directors. It was designed to be a training school for unionists throughout the English-speaking Caribbean.<sup>19</sup>

During its first 13 years of operation (1962–1975) AIFLD had had 257,928 labor leaders attending courses in “residential centers and in regional

seminars in Latin America and the Caribbean." It had brought 1,803 Latin American and Caribbean labor leaders to advanced courses at the Front Royal Institute. Finally, it had "145 selected Latin American and Caribbean labor economists in advanced training in its special courses in the U.S. universities."<sup>20</sup>

## THE SOCIAL PROJECTS DIVISION

The so-called Social Projects Division of the AIFLD began as a housing program, with AIFLD making relatively low-interest loans to Latin American and Caribbean unions for building housing projects for their members. Within a year, AIFLD claimed to have such projects started in 19 different countries. However, as interest rates in the United States rose in the late 1960s and early 1970s, this program was no longer feasible.

By the mid-1970s there were three sources of funds for the Social Projects Division. One was a so-called impact projects program, financed out of the contributions to AIFLD by the AFL-CIO and its member unions. These impact projects were generally grants (not loans) of up to \$5,000 to Latin American or Caribbean unions for such things as acquiring a union headquarters. The second source was the Regional Revolving Fund of the AIFLD, which made loans (not grants) to Latin American and Caribbean unions for such things as launching credit unions and other projects involving larger sums of money. As of 1975, the record of repayment of these loans was described by the AIFLD official in charge of the Social Projects Program as "pretty good."

Finally, AIFLD sometimes had access to funds that U.S. ambassadors had at their disposal for impact projects. These funds were generally small and were grants. Of course, the availability of these monies depended upon the degree to which a local U.S. ambassador was willing to cooperate with the AIFLD operation in the country to which he was accredited.<sup>21</sup>

In its 1975 Annual Progress Report, AIFLD provided an overall view of what the Social Projects Department had done since the inception of the institute. It had assisted unions with which it worked in providing 18,048 houses for their members. The total cost of this program had been \$77,291,060, and the money for it had come from a variety of sources. These included money from the Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank and from the governments of Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay. The AFL-CIO had also contributed unspecified amounts of funding for projects in Ecuador and Venezuela.

AIFLD had also administered "in excess of \$60,000" from the AFL-CIO's Impact Projects Program, "for medicines in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador, for medical clinics in Uruguay; for community centers in Panama and Bolivia, and for other community development projects in the hemisphere.

The 1975 Progress Report explained that "[t]hese projects are financed from the original \$600,000 given to the program by the AFL-CIO, plus

repayments from previous loans. To date 402 projects have been approved in 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries from Argentina to Mexico. The projects require substantial self-help and in addition to the types of projects approved for 1974 they include school construction, disaster relief, cooperative development and other projects of a type of general interest to the community."<sup>22</sup>

## BUREAUCRATIC-ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

Over the decades during which it functioned, AIFLD faced a wide variety of difficulties. Some involved more or less internal problems, which might be described as bureaucratic-administrative. The top officials of the AIFLD were quite aware of these issues.

One kind of problem was the relationship of the country program directors (CPDs) with the U.S. embassies in the countries in which they were working. The directors were drawn from a variety of different backgrounds, from university teachers to people straight out of leadership positions in U.S. unions. In some cases they were better off financially than they had ever been before and perhaps could ever expect to be again. These factors sometimes influenced their relations with the embassy as well as with the union leaders with whom they worked in their country of assignment.

William Doherty Jr., the longtime head of AIFLD, recognized these problems. He said that there were those CPDs who were too closely associated with the U.S. embassy. Some had embassy commissary privileges, which should perhaps not be the case. Some also worked too closely with embassy personnel, although Doherty added that in most cases where this happened it was because the embassy forced that relationship.

Much depended upon the attitude of the ambassador and the labor attaché toward the AIFLD operation within the country. Some took the position that the AIFLD people were the experts insofar as the trade union movement was concerned, they trusted the AIFLD people as being loyal to the United States, and felt that they were trying to do things consistent with the objectives of U.S. foreign policy, and they therefore did not interfere with AIFLD operations in the country involved. Others tried to limit AIFLD operations or to keep strict control over them. One ambassador in Uruguay tried to have the AIFLD operations closed down, while an ambassador in Colombia forced the AIFLD to cancel a program of helping the organizational activities of the local union groups with which AIFLD was working.<sup>23</sup>

An extreme case of ambassadorial intervention in AIFLD activities was that of one U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic. He tried to keep complete control over AIFLD activities in that country, demanding that virtually every day the country program director report to him what AIFLD was doing, and he gave the CPD orders concerning what to do



next. Finally William Doherty went to the Dominican Republic to protest to the ambassador—with exactly what results we do not know.<sup>24</sup>

AIFLD also had what might be called personal problems. These particularly involved the country program directors, who were drawn principally from the ranks of the U.S. labor movements. They varied considerably in their understanding of the cultural and other differences between Latin America and the United States. Some fitted in very well to the Latin American environment, particularly those who were themselves of Hispanic background. However, some did not do as well. One not unfriendly critic of AIFLD cited to me the case of a CPD who could not keep an appointment with a local labor leader because he had a date to play golf, not realizing that in that country golf was regarded by the workers as a rich man's game.<sup>25</sup> In 1975, one top official of AIFLD estimated that about 40 percent of those CPDs employed in the previous five or six years had been dismissed.<sup>26</sup>

Another more or less internal problem was the relationship of AIFLD with the State Department and its direct subsidiary, the Agency for International Development, which largely financed the institute. From time to time, officers of both State and AID, accompanied by the evaluation officer of AIFLD, made inspection tours to various Latin American and Caribbean countries in which the institute was functioning, to see whether it was adequately carrying out the programs to which it was committed in those countries.<sup>27</sup>

## PROBLEMS WITH LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GOVERNMENTS

The work of AIFLD in any particular country required at least the tolerance of the government of that country. In a few cases, such tolerance was withheld or withdrawn by particular Latin American or Caribbean regimes.

There were several reasons for such hostile attitudes by particular governments. One was undoubtedly the fact that AIFLD had a general rule of working principally, if not exclusively, with unions that were affiliated with the ICFTU and/or its regional American affiliate, ORIT. There were some instances in which governments that were more or less closely aligned with trade union groups hostile to ICFTU-ORIT required the withdrawal of AIFLD country program directors. This occurred in Peru during the reformist military regime of the early 1970s, which was well disposed toward the Communist faction of the national labor movement and with another confederation that the regime itself fostered. The government forced the closing of the AIFLD office in Lima, and although AIFLD continued to help the Confederación de Trabajadores del Perú through the country program director in Bolivia, the number of times that that CPD could go into the country was limited both by the Peruvian government and by the U.S. ambassador.<sup>28</sup>

Another reason for a national government forcing suspension of AIFLD activities in its country was the supposed subversive potential of AIFLD's work. This was the case in El Salvador where, starting in 1967, the institute had fostered organization among the peasantry, establishing communal centers that organized a variety of cooperative efforts, such as buying inputs together, renting land for their members to cultivate. Within a few years, AIFLD claimed to have some 118,000 peasants involved in these organizations. Fearful of the political potential of the Unión de Centros Comunales in a country in which power was largely in the hands of landowners and commercial and banking interests allied with them, the El Salvador government demanded the shutting down of AIFLD operations in the country.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the Sandinista government in Nicaragua closed down the AIFLD office there in 1981 because of its support of the ICFTU-ORIT affiliate in that country.<sup>30</sup>

## THE QUESTION OF EMPLOYER COLLABORATION IN AIFLD

One aspect of AIFLD that engendered considerable criticism from both within AIFLD and the AFL-CIO leadership and from those who were fundamentally opposed to the institute was the role played by employer representatives. The idea of having business representatives on the AIFLD Board of Trustees apparently originated with George Meany, the president of the AFL-CIO.<sup>31</sup>

Some of the people on the staff of AIFLD did not like having employer representatives on the Board of Trustees. They thought that it hurt AIFLD in Latin America, and particularly in the light of attacks frequently made on the role of multinational corporations in Latin America, the presence of representatives of those companies on the board of AIFLD gave enemies of the institute a handy weapon to use against it in both Latin America and the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Andrew McLellan, who succeeded Serafino Romualdi as Latin American representative of the AFL-CIO, also thought that the presence of employer representatives in the governing board of AIFLD was harmful to the organization. He thought that it raised all kinds of issues for the trade unionists in Latin America with whom AIFLD worked, some of whom did not like it in principle and others who had to defend themselves against charges arising from the role of the employers' representatives in AIFLD. McLellan added that he did not think that it made much difference from the point of view of Communist propaganda, since the Communists would attack AIFLD in any case, but he did think that it damaged people who were friends of the U.S. labor movement.<sup>33</sup>

William Doherty Jr., the long-term head of AIFLD, felt that there were pros and cons, insofar as the employers' role was concerned. It was true that the employers' representatives did take an active part in the

proceedings of the Board of Trustees, although their firms did not provide very much of the money for AIFLD. He said that in some cases the employers interested in the institute felt that they had to bring pressure on their Latin American subsidiaries of their firms to improve their treatment of their workers' unions, which was a positive factor. On the other hand, they did give an opportunity for attacks on AIFLD in both the United States and Latin America, although Doherty did not think that these attacks had much effect on the people with whom the institute worked in Latin America. On balance, he did not think that employer participation in the Board of Trustees of AIFLD did much good, but neither did he think that their presence did much harm.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the clearest explanation of the usefulness of employer representation on the Board of Trustees of AIFLD was that such representation gave the institute important allies in the annual battle of the budget of the Agency for International Development, which included funds for the continuation of AIFLD.

Having observed AIFLD in a number of countries over a considerable period of years, it was clear to me that the operations of the institute in those countries was in the hands of people who were chosen by representatives of the AFL-CIO, and who in many cases were themselves U.S. labor leaders. I never encountered an instance in which officials of the companies that participated in the Board Trustees of AIFLD had tried to interfere with or influence the functioning of the institute in a Latin American or Caribbean country.

## THE QUESTION OF AIFLD IN COUNTRIES WITH DICTATORIAL REGIMES

The very name of AIFLD indicated that it was devoted to "free labor development." Inevitably, the question frequently arose to whether it should try to function in countries in which the government did not permit such development.

As its Statement of Principles indicated, AIFLD interpreted free labor development to mean, fundamentally, the establishment of the ability of workers to organize unions without interference of government or employers, and of the unions' right to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment with their employers, including the right to use the strike as one fundamental tool of negotiation. There are probably no countries (including the United States) in which these rights are absolute. This is certainly so in Latin America.

All Latin American countries have labor codes that in one way or another circumscribe the workers' right to have unions of their own choosing. Many also provide a framework within which collective bargaining must be conducted, and virtually all have some limitation on the right to

strike. However, where the government is democratically elected and is generally respectful of civil liberties and civil rights, the workers' unions usually find it possible to manage their own affairs and to negotiate more or less satisfactory agreements with the employers concerning wages, hours and working conditions of their members.

Nevertheless, in a number of cases AIFLD was faced with situations in which an undemocratic government came to power that was frankly hostile to free labor development as understood by AIFLD and the unions with which it was collaborating. In these cases, AIFLD had to decide whether it should try to continue to carry on its work in that country, making the best of a very bad situation.

At least three factors had to be considered in making such a decision. One was whether the government's hostility to free trade unionism was confined to certain parts of the economy, in which case something might still be accomplished by working with unions in segments of the economy to which this hostility did not apply. A notable example of this situation was Nicaragua during the later years of the Somoza family dictatorship—where unionism was almost entirely forbidden in segments of the economy owned by the Somoza dynasty, but had considerable leeway in those sectors that did not belong to the Somozas. There, AIFLD decided to carry on its operations as far as possible.<sup>35</sup>

In other situations, in which there were no segments of the economy in which any approach to free trade unionism was possible, there were at least two other factors that the AIFLD had to consider in deciding whether or not to try to continue some kind of operation in a country in which a dictatorship had come to power. There was the possibility that, in spite of existing limitations on free trade unionism and collective bargaining, a change in the situation could occur that might make it worthwhile to continue trying to inform union leaders about the nature of free trade unionism and of the process of collective bargaining.

Finally, there was also a situation in which AIFLD might decide to try to continue its operations at least to some degree, in spite of the government's severe crackdown on the labor movement. There might be a possibility, precisely because of AIFLD's connection with the AID and the U.S. government, for it to provide some kind of protective covering for unionists who were trying to offer some resistance to the complete suppression of a free labor movement.

Obviously, the choice of what to do in any of these situations was not clear cut. It was a matter of the leaders of AIFLD balancing what might be accomplished by continuing to work in the country involved, against what might be lost through discrediting the organization for what might be seen as complicity with a very undemocratic and/or tyrannical regime. People who were equally concerned with fostering free trade unionism might well disagree on what policy to follow—and they did so.

### THREE CASES OF DICTATORIAL REGIMES

In the summer of 1975 Henry Hammond, a onetime labor attaché in several U.S. embassies in Latin America, and I were asked by the Agency for International Development to do an on-the-spot study of AIFLD in several Latin American countries. In the process of carrying out this assignment, I was able to observe three situations such as those that have been outlined—Bolivia under the regime of General Banzer, Chile under General Pinochet, and Brazil under General Geisel, the fourth of the five generals who governed that country between 1964 and 1985. Some comments on what I say may be helpful in understanding this aspect of the history of AIFLD.

General Banzer had established a regime in which all major posts in the government were held by military men, although civilian technocrats collaborated with the regime, and it had the support of some private businessmen, particularly those in the relatively small privately-owned mining sector. The avowed aim of Banzer and his fellow soldiers was to suspend politics for a sufficient period of time for a new kind of civilian leaders to emerge who would be free of the corruption and demagoguery that the military men professes to believe had characterized the politicians before Banzer's seizure of power.

The military government introduced what they called Compulsory Civil Service. Under this system the government drafted people to take jobs in the government, and to head unions and professional associations. If someone refused to accept such a post, he was sentenced to jail for two years. Since most people were not heroes, there were few who refused.

On November 9, 1974, all trade union leadership posts were declared vacant. Then most of the elected union officials on each level of the union hierarchy were appointed as coordinators of their respective organizations. Only those appointed in the Miners Federation refused, and were jailed. They were released after a few months, because of strikes and other demonstrations in the mines; as a result the executive committees of the Miners Federation and of its unions remained intact, although the government went through the motions of naming the elected leaders, but not calling them coordinators.

I noted that

[i]n a large number of cases, the formerly elected leaders, now Coordinators, are being more or less totally discredited with their rank and file. They are seen as tools of the government.... In some cases, where they are able to continue to get things for the workers, as in the bank workers and petroleum workers, they have probably not been discredited. There have been some strikes in banks and in some industries. Some unions, including the bank workers and some industrial workers, have been able to get substantial wage increases for their members, in spite of a supposed government wage and price freeze.

AIFLD continued to operate in Bolivia in the face of this situation. They ran 90 courses in the first year of the military regime, and had some small social projects. I wrote about the AIFLD's operations:

They are working with the coordinators of the unions. Their thinking is that they are planting the ideas of democratic trade unionism, collective bargaining, for when the worm turns again, and things change. They don't think that they should abandon the coordinators, 90% of whom were elected officials, just because they are having a hard situation. They argue that they are giving much more support to the eventual resurgence of a free trade union movement by staying, showing that they are concerned with the workers, helping them insofar as possible, than they would do by leaving.<sup>36</sup>

The AIFLD people also gave as much support as they could to union leaders, particularly miners, who had been jailed for refusing to become coordinators in their unions. AIFLD sent them food, blankets and other things in jail. When they were released, the mine union leaders said that the AIFLD people had been the only ones who seemed to care about them.<sup>37</sup>

With regard to the government's attitude toward AIFLD operations, I noted:

The Labor Ministry, interestingly enough, also wants to see AIFLD continue. Whether this is the result of lack of understanding on the part of the Minister of the impact of what AIFLD is doing, or whether it is because they don't want to imperil the overall AID program of which AIFLD is part, I don't know. I don't think that it is because the AIFLD is serving as a tool or a conduit for the Ministry and the regime.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of Chile, the AIFLD program had been quite small before the military coup of 1973 that put General Pinochet in power. It had not been able to interest the unions that belonged to the Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile (CUTCh), which was largely dominated by the Socialist and Communist parties, in its program. Therefore, it was involved only with a handful of unions that belonged to ORIT, most particularly the Maritime Workers Confederation, and few weak independent unions, such as the Sugar Workers Confederation and the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Federation. In 1968, the country program director described the AIFLD program in Chile as "token" in nature.<sup>39</sup> It did not change substantially in the next five years, before the Pinochet coup in September 1973.

However, the situation changed drastically under the Pinochet regime. The labor movement was decimated, the CUTCh was outlawed, many top CUTCh leaders were jailed, went into exile or into hiding. In numerous other cases, Socialist and Communist union leaders stepped aside more or less voluntarily to give way to Radicals, Christian Democrats, or others who were deemed to be less likely to be victimized by the regime.

In the face of this situation, the Chilean program of AIFLD took on a completely new role. The changes in leadership in the unions that occurred after the Pinochet coup did not change the exceedingly hostile attitude of the Pinochet regime toward the labor movement in general. Various union leaders continued to be jailed, tortured, and even murdered. No union meetings could be held without the permission of the police. The drastic economic policies of the regime left no room for collective bargaining.

There was a small group of yellow unions that cooperated fully with the government, praising its every act. These included a small dissident commercial workers' group, the Health Workers Federation and the Libertad peasant federation. As I wrote at the time, "Their freedom and necks are secure, their future as labor leaders is not."

In contrast to these few unions that surrendered to the dictatorship, there emerged a group of union leaders who were trying to stand up to the government. These included Tucapel Jiménez of the government workers' union, the Asociación de Empleados Fiscales, Eduardo Ríos of the Maritime Confederation, Ernesto Vogel of the Railroad Federation, Federico Mujica of the Confederación Nacional de Empleados Particulares (privately employed white-collar workers), and Guillermo Santana of the Copper Workers Confederation. They were of various political affiliations. Jiménez was a member of the Radical Party, Mujica had no political affiliation, and most of the other members of this group were Christian Democrats.

It was this group with whom the AIFLD worked. I wrote in July 1975, after visiting Chile, that

[t]he role of the AIFLD now is twofold. On the one hand, they are training young people who, if something like normalcy reappears, will be able to assume leadership. Much more important, AIFLD is giving protective covering to the real labor movement, to those who are trying to keep it alive. They are providing a place where labor leaders can meet, at the AIFLD headquarters in Santiago, and at and after seminars and courses in the provinces. Appearances of the Country Program Director and the Embassy Labor Attaché at the 'clausura' [closing] of courses, gives prestige and protection to the labor leaders.... The Chilean government as yet is not foolhardy enough to create an incident with the United States over such things, and to isolate itself completely in the world by cutting its links with the United States.<sup>40</sup>

I also recorded what happened at the graduation ceremony of one of the AIFLD's courses:

The meeting reflected the tensions now existing in the Chile labor scene and in the Chilean scene generally. Tucapel Jiménez... gave as militant a speech as possible under the circumstances, calling for labor solidarity in a difficult situation, and rebutting a statement of approval of the government's proposed new labor code made by one of the student speakers. Art Nixon, the United States Labor Attaché,



and Joe Campos of the AIFLD, cautiously praised free trade unionism, and Nixon indicated support of the AFL-CIO for the workers' struggle; by implication he also indicated the support of this by the United States Government.

I also noted:

It is significant under the present circumstances that Federico Mujica of the Commercial Workers, Eduardo Ríos of the Maritime Workers, and Ernesto Vogel of the railroad workers were present. . . . They are doing so at the risk of their freedom and perhaps their lives. Their policy is to be seen in public together as much as possible, and to be seen particularly at functions of the AIFLD, which has the support and financing of the United States government.<sup>41</sup>

Elements in the Pinochet regime were very unhappy about the AIFLD operations. Late in 1975 the government prohibited four of the courses that AIFLD had programmed. Reportedly, Minister of Labor General Díaz was particularly upset by a course held in the Chuquicamata copper mining area, where all of the principal union leaders who were working against the regime and its policies were present, and he threatened that so long as Joseph Campos remained as head of AIFLD in Chile, it would not be allowed to conduct any more courses. He apparently did not carry out his threat, at least at that time.<sup>42</sup>

The courses conducted by AIFLD were on a comparatively simple level. In choosing local labor leaders to conduct these courses, the AIFLD country program director, Joseph Campos, did not play favorites politically. They included people who were Christian Democrats, Radicals, and Socialists.

Similarly, the doors of the AIFLD headquarters were open to unionists of all political colors. Among others, a number of Communists went there to meet with trade union conferees and with AIFLD.<sup>43</sup>

AIFLD had perhaps its largest single operation in Brazil. But it had long been clear that the labor movement there was not free in terms of AIFLD's definition of that term. When I visited Brazil for the AID in 1975, the U.S. ambassador had reached the conclusion that AIFLD should no longer function there since he felt that its presence in the country appeared to give endorsement not only to the treatment of organized labor by the military regime then in power, but also to the much longer-run system of government control of organized labor that had persisted since the late 1930s.<sup>44</sup>

The Brazilian labor movement, as it persisted for almost half a century, had been the product of the corporative-minded Estado Novo (New State) dictatorship that President Getúlio Vargas established in 1937. Vargas' Consolidation of Labor Laws (*Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho*), which continued to be valid until the late 1980s, provided not only that unions could only exist if they had government recognition (not uncommon in Latin America), but specified the exact jurisdiction of any legal union, or

group of unions, limited drastically what unions could spend their funds on, and gave government extensive control over union elections. Central labor organizations on local, state or national level were forbidden, the only permitted nationwide union groups being seven sectoral confederations specified in the *Consolidação*. Perhaps most crucial, virtually all income for labor organizations came from a trade union tax—one day's wage per year from every wage or salaried worker in the country.

Union funds were to be spent exclusively on social welfare activities—medical and dental services, educational institutions for union members and their families, sometimes legal aid for union members, expenses of presenting union requests to the labor courts, and payment of the bureaucracy necessary for administering these activities. Strike funds, of course, were absolutely forbidden, since strikes were illegal.

There was no place for collective bargaining in the *Estado Novo* system. Its place was taken by a series of government labor courts. The unions' role was limited to nominating a minority of judges for these courts, and periodically submitting a list of changes in working conditions that they desired, with the labor courts having complete authority to decide which changes would be made.<sup>45</sup>

During the half century history of the *Consolidação das Leis Trabalho* the strict enforcement of it had differed greatly from one time to another. After the military coup of March-April 1964, it was enforced with particular severity. There was a widespread and drastic purge of the trade union leadership. In the years that followed there were many further purges of individual unions. Collective bargaining was strongly discouraged.

In the 1970s, during the administration of the fourth of the five generals who ruled between 1964 and 1985, President Ernesto Geisel, government controls over organized labor were considerably relaxed, and in the last years of the decade a new labor movement developed (and in the following decade triumphed), which repudiated the *Estado Novo* system, sought freedom of the unions to manage their own affairs, and to negotiate freely with their employers.

When I visited Brazil on the mission for the AID in 1975, the major question that faced AIFLD there was whether it should continue to operate in the country. There, as elsewhere, it had both an educational-training program and a social projects operation.

I concluded that the director of the Instituto Cultural do Trabalho, in charge of the AIFLD educational-training operation, who was a vice president of the São Paulo telephone workers' union, was a "a very sophisticated man, democratic in his beliefs, with no illusions about the present union system being democratic. He sees his job as building for a future break in the system, to try to train people to make the best of the present system for the workers, but with an eye to practicing collective bargaining when and if that becomes possible." However, his four-man executive committee consisted of men "who are more or less 'pelegos,' that is,

labor leaders thoroughly integrated into the present system, and inclined more often than not to do what the Ministry of Labor wants in any given situation."

There were certain strong arguments against the AIFLD's continuing its educational training work in Brazil. I wrote at the time that

[i]n order to function in Brazil today, AIFLD has to have at least the tolerance of the present regime, particularly the Ministry of Labor and the security forces. There is a thin line between being tolerated and collaborating, and it is a difficult one to tread. Also the AIFLD under present conditions must have contacts with labor people who have been corrupted by the system, to one degree or another, as well as with those who have not. If the AIFLD becomes too closely associated in the minds of the rank and file of the labor movement, and in the minds of lower-ranking labor leaders, with collaboration with the military regime, and with association with corrupted and venal labor leaders, this will only discredit the idea of "free trade unionism." It will discredit AIFLD itself, and those labor leaders who have anything to do with it.

However, in spite of these difficulties, as I wrote, "my considered judgment is that the AIFLD is at this point more positive than negative." I found that the AIFLD message of collective bargaining rather than appeals to government labor courts had by no means been delivered in vain. A significant number of unions had worked out so-called *acordados* directly with their employers rather than seeking labor court *dissidios colectivos*. Also, AIFLD courses undoubtedly helped union leaders to learn how to make better use of the existing system for their members than would otherwise be the case. I commented that "I don't endorse the 'all or nothing' approach, that if one cannot get U.S. or European style collective bargaining in toto, one should not use what little leverage there is to push in this direction under the present system."

The social projects part of AIFLD in Brazil also seemed to me, on balance, to be positive. There were about 250 such projects in 1975, principally loans to local unions for obtaining headquarters, equipping these with necessary office equipment and equipment for educational and medical-dental activities for union members. There was a very good record of repayment of these loans.

One final act impressed me as positive about the AIFLD program in Brazil in 1975. This was the fact that Country Program Director Americo Ramos, a furniture worker union leader from Massachusetts, who had been in Brazil for about nine years, had developed a very wide acquaintance among the country's unionists. I wrote at the time that "[t]he 'diplomatic' job of Americo Ramos is invaluable. His contacts, as a fellow trade unionist, not as a U.S. government official, with trade unionists all over the country are exceedingly extensive. Certainly these contacts are valuable to United States labor."

Finally, it seemed to me that "[m]any lower-ranking labor leaders, relatively free of corruption by the system, and some of those higher up in the hierarchy who were also relatively independent, appreciate AIFLD and what it is trying to do. They will tell you that, of course, in the present circumstances, they cannot use all of the ideas and techniques which they have learned, but they are looking forward to the day when they can use them more fully. They do not look upon AIFLD as collaborating with the regime, but rather as cooperating with Brazilian organized labor to the best of their ability."<sup>46</sup>

In retrospect, it would appear the judgment that there was more positive than negative about the AIFLD's operations in Brazil at least in the latter part of the period of military rule was confirmed. By 1990, the Estado Novo system of labor relations had finally been largely abolished, there was a strong voluntary labor market, with two major central labor organizations and a couple of smaller ones, and collective bargaining rather than labor court decisions was the instrumentality used by most of the country's unions. Early in that year, Lawrence Doherty, the country program director of AIFLD in Brazil, concluded that in the long run the AIFLD work there had been successful. He noted that "the great majority of the members of the National Council of one of the new central labor organizations, the General Confederation of Labor, had gone through AIFLD courses, and that "a considerable number" of these had been to the Front Royal school. Although he had no precise figures about the largest central labor group, the CGT, he presumed that "a substantial number" of those had also been in the AIFLD program.<sup>47</sup>

## ATTACKS ON AIFLD

In the early 1970s, AIFLD was subjected to an extensive series of attacks from both inside and outside of the U.S. labor movement. The attackers alleged that AIFLD was a creation of the CIA and was controlled by that agency for, among other things, creation of company unions that would give no trouble to U.S. multinationals operating in the area; for plotting the overthrow of progressive governments such as those of Salvador Allende in Chile and João Goulart in Brazil; and was conducting espionage on the agency's behalf in all of the countries in which it operated.

To a considerable degree, this flurry of criticism and attack was stimulated by the publication in Great Britain of a book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* by a former official of the CIA, Philip Agee. Among the revelations of this book were that the ICFTU was "set up and controlled by the CIA to oppose the World Federation of Trade Unions;" that the ICCTU was "used as a mechanism for CIA labor operations;"<sup>48</sup> that "most" of the International Trade Secretariats "have been used by the CIA for labor operations." Agee also claimed that George Meany, the head of the AFL-CIO, was the "principal CIA agent and collaborator in U.S. trade union movement for purposes

of CIA international labor operations;"<sup>49</sup> while Serafino Romualdi was the "principal CIA agent for labor operations in Latin America."<sup>50</sup>

Initiative from within the U.S. labor movement for attacking AIFLD and, more generally, the whole foreign policy of the AFL-CIO was taken by Fred Hirsch, a member of the Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 393 in San Jose, California. He published a pamphlet entitled *An Analysis of Our AFL-CIO Role in Latin America, or, Under the Covers With the CIA*, and was co-author of a smaller pamphlet called *CIA and the Labour Movement*. Hirsch particularly accused the AFL-CIO of participating, through AIFLD and in other ways, in plotting the overthrow of the Allende government in Chile, and in collaborating with the Pinochet regime's suppression of a free labor movement. He dramatically concluded: "We can only conclude that the extent of treason, by AIFLD et al, to every concept of worker solidarity, goes beyond conceivable limits, that the switches on the electric generators, and the triggers of the firing squads were as surely pulled by soft hands in the executive offices of the AFL-CIO—as surely as they were by the sadistic, brute guerrillas of Pinochet."<sup>51</sup>

Clearly, what I discovered in visiting Chile in the summer of 1975 bore no resemblance to the picture given by Fred Hirsch. The AIFLD that I saw there was providing a kind of direct help and even diplomatic cover for those labor leaders who were trying to keep alive at least some part of the labor movement that the Pinochet dictatorship was doing its best to dismember. Those with whom AIFLD was working were not collaborators with the dictatorship, but were trying to maintain as much resistance as possible given the circumstances. One of the principal leaders with whom they worked, Tucapel Jiménez, was murdered by the regime for his efforts.

Those critical of the AIFLD and generally of the AFL-CIO foreign policy sought to arouse a strong movement within organized labor to bring about the abolition of AIFLD. The pamphlet of Hirsch and his colleague, from which we have already quoted, noted:

A pamphlet recounting the history of the AFL-CIO involvement and the AIFLD in Chile has been received in thousands of unions across the U.S. In the fall of 1975 every U.S. national union, every State Federation of Labour, every local Central Labour Council, a number of selected unions and the labour press received an 'Open Letter' describing in documental detail, AIFLD's work with the ITS's to organize a union among the professional unions in Chile to sabotage the UP government and then to build a yellow labour movement in the service of the Pinochet Junta.<sup>52</sup>

This campaign was also taken up by the journal *Counter-Spy*, the self-styled "Quarter Journal of The Fifth Estate." It published articles on the subject in both its Fall 1974 and Winter 1975 issues. All of this effort did not seem to arouse any backlash for the AFL-CIO leadership of AIFLD, either within the labor movement or in Congress.

## CONCLUSION

The American Institute for Free Labor Development, although an organization dominated by the AFL-CIO and largely financed by the AID, had a substantial impact on the organized labor movement in Latin America and the Caribbean for three decades. Given its considerable financial resources, it was able to carry out a very extensive program of education and training of labor union leaders that ORIT did not have the funds to sustain. It generally worked with the union groups affiliated with ORIT and ICFTU and with a number of the ITS.

AIFLD also carried out a program of social projects that included financing the establishment of union headquarters, the organization of cooperatives, and a variety of other things that supplemented the basic function of the unions, that is, dealing directly with the employers in collective bargaining. These projects certainly helped to make the unions involved more attractive and useful to their members.

AIFLD was certainly a child of the Cold War. It was launched by the AFL-CIO as part of its effort to help the unions of Latin America and the Caribbean that were aligned with the ICFTU and ORIT, in opposition to the Communist-controlled ones that belonged to or were associated with CTAL and WFTU, and to a less degree those affiliated with CLASC-CLAT and the World Confederation of Labor. However, that did not lessen its significance as an organization that was attempting to make the labor movements involved more able to carry out their basic objective of being strong enough to defend their members in collective bargaining and to give the working class a large and more effective role in the economic, political, and social life of their respective countries.

## NOTES

1. Ben Stephansky (onetime labor attaché in Mexico, erstwhile labor advisor to assistant secretary of state for Latin America, former U.S. ambassador to Bolivia), interview with the author in Chevy Chase, MD, June 27, 1975.

2. Serafino Romualdi, *Presidents and Peons: Recollections of a Labor Ambassador in Latin America* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967), pp. 405–417.

3. Stephansky, interview.

4. Romualdi, *Presidents and Peons*, p. 420.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 419–422.

6. Stephansky, interview.

7. Romualdi, *Presidents and Peons*, pp. 420–421.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 420.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 426.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 432.

11. American Institute for Free Labor Development, "Declaration of Objectives," Washington, DC, n.d.

12. "The American Institute for Free Labor Development—1962–1975: Annual Progress Report" (printed).

13. "American Institute for Free Labor Development: 10th Anniversary Year, 1962–1972—A Decade of Worker-to-Worker Cooperation" (printed).
14. "The American Institute for Free Labor Development—1962–1975."
15. Joseph Solterer (professor emeritus of economics, Georgetown University), interview with the author in Washington, DC, July 3, 1975.
16. Camille Waldeck (director of AIFLD labor economics course), interview with the author in Washington, DC, July 3, 1975.
17. "The American Institute for Free Labor Development—1962–1975."
18. Robert J. Alexander, "Observations on AIFLD in Brazil," Brasilia, August 10, 1975 (typewritten), Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.
19. Neville Griffith (registrar, Critchlow Labor College), interview with the author in Georgetown, Guyana, September 8, 1970.
20. "The American Institute for Free Labor Development—1962–1975."
21. William Doherty Jr. (director of Social Projects Division, AIFLD), interview with the author in Mexico City, August 20, 1963; and James Holloway (director of Social Projects Division, AIFLD), interview with the author in Front Royal, VA, July 1, 1975.
22. "The American Institute for Free Labor Development—1962–1975."
23. William Doherty Jr. (director of AIFLD), interview with the author in Front Royal, VA, July 1, 1975.
24. Dan Montenegro (evaluation officer of AIFLD), interview with the author in Front Royal, VA, July 1, 1975.
25. Eduardo Medrano (Peruvian trade union leader, former Latin American representative of International Transport Workers Federation, official of Organization of American States Labor Division), interview with the author in Washington, DC, June 23, 1975.
26. Montenegro, interview.
27. Ibid.
28. Charles Wheeler (AIFLD country program director for Bolivia and Peru), interview with the author in Lima, Peru, July 17 and 19, 1975.
29. Sam Haddad (official of AIFLD), interview with the author in Washington, DC, June 24, 1975.
30. Clifford Krauss, "Labor Activists: Aided by Washington, AFL-CIO Unit Backs Latin Goals of U.S.," *Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 1985.
31. Doherty, interview.
32. Haddad, interview, in Front Royal, VA, July 1, 1975.
33. Andrew McLellan (Latin American representative of AFL-CIO), interview with the author in Front Royal, VA, July 1, 1975.
34. Doherty, interview.
35. Abel Icabalceta (secretario de conflictos, Sindicato de Trabajadores Aéreos of Nicaragua), interview with the author in Managua, June 26, 1967.
36. Alexander, "Observations on Bolivia," La Paz, July 22, 1975 (typewritten), Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.
37. Wheeler, interview, in La Paz, Bolivia, July 21, 1975.
38. Alexander, "Observations on Bolivia."
39. Thomas Miller (AIFLD country program director in Chile), interview with the author in Santiago, Chile, July 3, 1968.
40. Alexander, "Observations on Chile," Santiago, Chile, July 27, 1975 (typewritten), Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries.



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42. Joseph Campos (AIFLD country program director in Chile), interview with the author in Washington, DC, December 17, 1975.
43. Campos, interview, in Santiago, Chile, July 23, 1975.
44. John Crimmins (U.S. ambassador to Brazil), interview with the author in Brasilia, August 8, 1975.
45. See Robert J. Alexander, *Labor Relations in Argentina, Brazil and Chile* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962) for an extensive description of the Estado Novo system.
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47. Lawrence Doherty (AIFLD country program director in Brazil), interview with the author in São Paulo, January 30, 1990.
48. "References to Labor in Agee Book," Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, n.d. (mimeographed), appendix, p. 4.
49. Ibid., appendix, p. 5.
50. Ibid., appendix, p. 7.
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